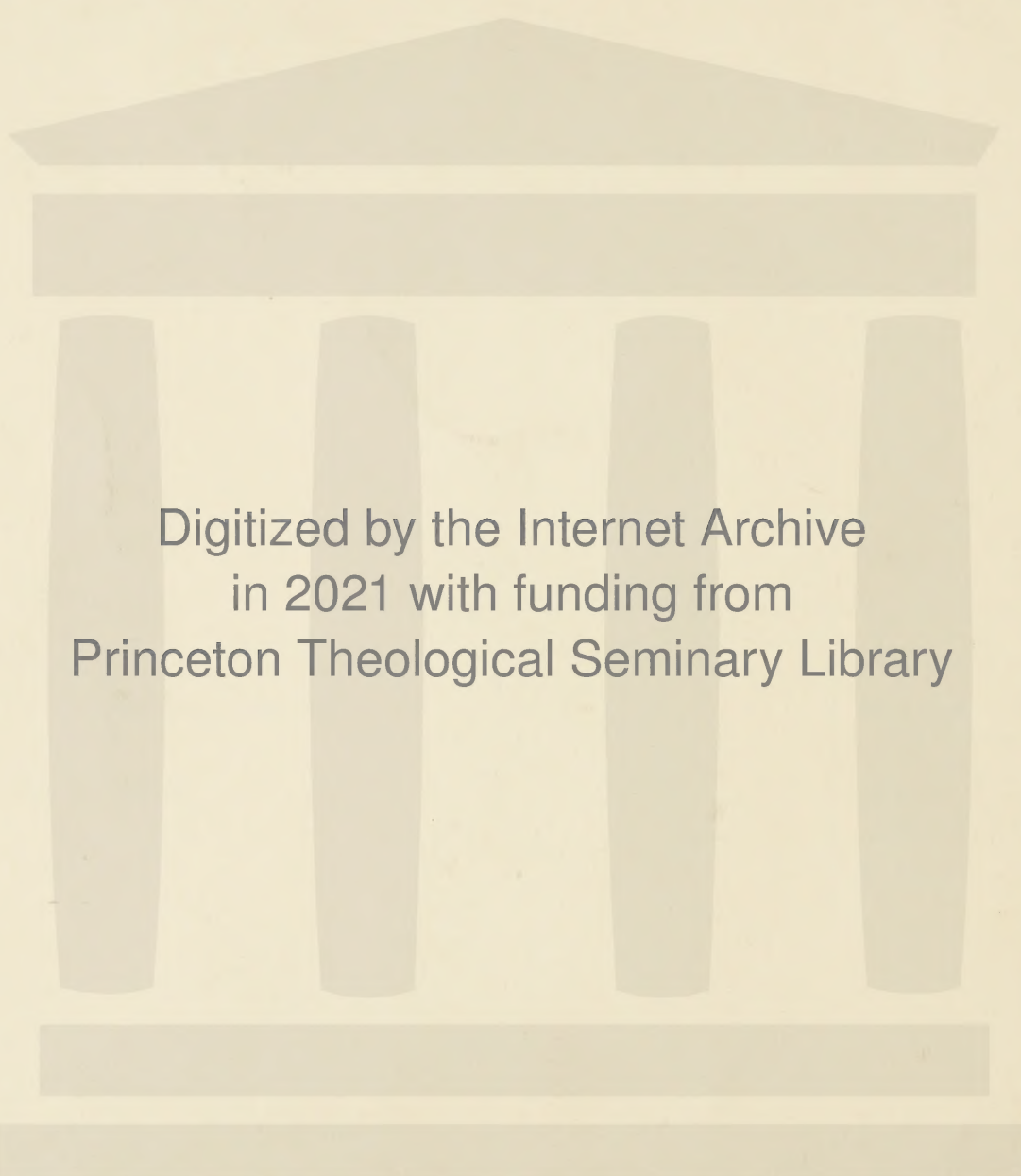


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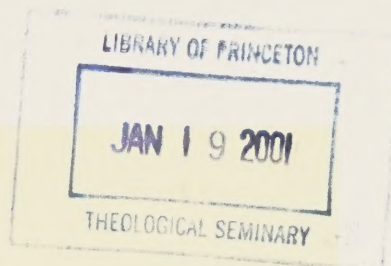
The Princeton Theological Review

a journal by students, alumnae, and friends of Princeton Theological Seminary

that the light of God's truth may shine bright and increase

SPRING/SUMMER 2000

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE



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Essays in Honor of James E. Loder

The first three feature articles of this double issue are published in honor of Dr. James Loder, the Mary D. Synott Professor of the Philosophy of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary. The length of his academic title is appropriate, if we allow it to point us to the breadth of Dr. Loder's thought. In fact, as we considered the possibility of publishing some pieces on Dr. Loder, a recurring question was, where do you start? Where do you begin to delve into the mysterious world of Loderian thought—Kierkegaard, Freud, Einstein, Bohr, Jung, Piaget, Barth, Calvin, and Luther? And what about Escher, *The Knight's Move*, the Strange Loop, figure-ground reversals and double negation?

There was, however, a darker side to the question: Why haven't more people made the attempt? Why is it that James Loder is not more appreciated outside the walls of Princeton Theological Seminary?

In James Loder we find one of the most insightful Christian thinkers in America today, and a man who truly deserves the title of an "interdisciplinary scholar." That anyone could master the science of theology seems remarkable to the gaggle of students simply trying to recognize the wheat and the chaff in this field. But when you realize that Dr. Loder is equally conversant in philosophy, psychology, and physics, you begin to sense that you are in the company of someone very special.

Not that you need to know anything about Dr. Loder's breadth of scope to recognize this. Visiting just one of his lectures will do. Things appear quite normal at first. The room buzzes as hectic students arrive, find a desk, dig their books out of their bags,

and chat with one another about various assignments. But then Dr. Loder starts to pray, *really pray*, and suddenly the lecture hall is transformed into the church, and you are inviting the Spirit of God to come and teach you. As Dr. Loder lectures, you wonder how it is that he could have written all of this with you in mind, and when he speaks about the love of God, and a wash of joyful tears glimmers in his eye, you wonder, Why isn't this the norm? Why can't I pray like that? Why can't I love God like that?

And Dr. Loder would certainly answer, *you can*.

As we devote three articles of this double issue to the thought of Dr. James Loder, we recognize it is far too small a gesture of thanks, and far too meager an effort to plumb the depths of a great thinker. Nevertheless we hope to give our readers a wonderful taste of the mysterious world of his thought, and trust they will be left longing for more. First, Scott Lumsden focuses on the significance of Loder's work for ministry and theology. Then, Matt Frawley explores the unparalleled insights of Dr. Loder on one of his favorite thinkers, Søren Kierkegaard. Finally, Leron Shults shows the fascinating result of Dr. Loder's thought applied to the area of philosophical theology. We trust this is the beginning of a long and significant path of scholarship.

MATTHEW KOENIG
General Editor

Theology that Matters!

James Loder's Significance for Pastoral Ministry

by Scott Lumsden

Let me begin by saying clearly that I believe no student at Princeton Seminary should be able to graduate without taking a course from James Loder. An audacious claim? Not really. It is much more daring to say that no pastor should begin ministry before reading at least one of Loder's books, which is something I also believe, and hope to show through the course of this article.

James Loder's Ministry to Students

Now, I should admit that I almost graduated from Princeton seminary without taking a course from Loder. The second semester of my senior year I found myself in a very difficult situation. I had planned to do a six-credit senior thesis to fulfill my degree, and had even chosen the topic "The Theology of T. F. Torrance: Going Through and Beyond Karl Barth." Unfortunately, two days before the registration period ended, I had never secured a thesis advisor. I had nightmarish visions of Dr. James Kay exposing my ineptitude to the entire commencement congregation: "...and Scott Lumsden would be graduating now, if he had given up the thesis idea." Yet Dr. Kay had the vision that would save the day as he suggested that I speak with Dr. Loder. How could I have forgotten that Loder not only knew T. F. Torrance, but had recently completed a book in which Torrance's work played a significant part (*The Knight's Move*)? He was of course very busy but he listened patiently to my dilemma in his office, and signed on the dotted line. Three months later I handed in my thesis and graduated.

I offer this experience to illustrate something about the practice of ministry and of the message of

Jim Loder's life and thought. When I approached Dr. Loder, the issue at stake was much larger than a simple thesis. I desperately wanted to make something of my time at Princeton. I wanted to have something personal to show alongside that piece of paper hanging on my wall. Even more than that, I wanted the opportunity to get better acquainted with a theologian whom I had admired for years, T. F. Torrance. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Torrance the previous February, and then visit him again in June and January in Scotland. So the thesis was symbolic. It signified a long journey whose zenith was a personal encounter with a man who was almost single-handedly responsible for my theological development. It would become a marking point in the life of a young theologian who was exploring a call to ministry.

Dr. Loder could have complained that I had not given him any warning, or he could have said that it was my fault for not taking care of this sooner, and he would have been right in both cases. Yet he saw in this dilemma an opportunity for ministry: to allow me to embrace this event and complete this small but important pilgrimage. Dr. Loder saw the importance of this thesis for me, and helped give structure and meaning to a chapter in my life which God had begun many years before.

This is characteristic of Dr. Loder's work as a whole.

Scott Lumsden (PTS 98) is the Assistant Pastor of Visitation at Lakehurst Presbyterian Church, and the Interim Director for Junior High Youth Ministry at Red Bank Presbyterian Church.

Throughout his books and lectures, and even more importantly in his life, Jim Loder affirms God's Presence and Spirit working in the transforming moments of one's life. He gets to the heart of what ministry is all about: the redemptive and transforming work of God's Spirit in the lives of his people. There's no better way to describe the practice of ministry and there's no better way to describe James Loder's work. This is why he is so foundational to anyone who is actively engaged in or is planning on practicing ministry.

James Loder challenges the minister with two basic claims. The first is that convictional experiences are a normal part of one's spiritual development, and second, that convictional experiences become transforming only when one embraces God's Spirit acting in the midst of crises. In the remainder of this article I will focus on each of these claims, as they are expressed in one of Loder's early books *The Transforming Moment*, and as they relate to both ministry and theology.

Convictional Experience

In order to understand better James Loder's work, it is helpful to know where he's coming from. James Loder speaks from experience when he talks about God's gracious presence in the midst of human crises. In the opening chapter of *The Transforming Moment*, Dr. Loder relates how his family's life was turned upside down one summer in 1970. On the very first day of a trip to Canada, the Loder family spied a woman on the side of the road who needed assistance with her car. Alarmed at her close proximity to the highway, Dr. Loder pulled over, climbed out, and attempted to help change her tire. At this point, another motorist, who had fallen asleep at the wheel, came barreling into the stranded woman's car, pinned Dr. Loder under the car, and dragged him fifteen feet until a collision with Dr. Loder's own camper, parked in front of the disabled vehicle, halted the trail. Dr. Loder's wife Arlene found him pinned under the car, and then, repeating the words, "In the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of Jesus Christ," she heaved the car up and allowed Dr. Loder to pry himself out from under it. Strangely enough, he remained conscious throughout the whole affair, even the surgery immediately afterward, and it is here that the story takes a remarkable turn. Instead of feeling overwhelmed with grief or panic at this scene, Dr. Loder was instead

overcome with a strength and grace that he could not account for. Instead of anger, he felt peace; instead of hate he felt love; instead of broken he felt whole; his first words to his children after the accident were "don't worry, this has a purpose." Those words are a powerful testimony to God's redemptive purpose in the midst of a truly broken moment.

In the coming days God would fully heal his body, his missing thumb the only visible reminder of that life changing day. Though the experience was indeed life changing, it confirmed a life-long observation that would become a distinctive theme in his work, and the genesis for his book, *The Transforming Moment*, the theme of which is this: in the midst of a culture that is increasingly drawn to the spiritual, we were never more ill-equipped to handle the reality of true spiritual experience than we are now.¹ We worship the subjectivity of life, yet at the same time most of us rely on the human sciences to "verify" our convictions.² Dr. Loder finds support for this idea not only in our common experience, but also in the history of psychology and human development. It is true that the basic claims of these human sciences cannot be minimized in life and in ministry, yet there are places at which the claims of Christian theology must be

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to us in Jesus Christ.***

taken into account. If human development desires to remain human it must give central place to a spiritual dimension. For Dr. Loder, this means that we must reassess what we are taking about when we talk about *convictional experience*.

Loder states that in the midst of human experience, there is a need to be connected (reconciled) with one's Creator. Real spirituality is inherent in all human life, leading us not only seek reconciliation and love from others, but more importantly, toward acceptance of the reconciliation and love al-

ready present to us in Jesus Christ. Convictional experiences then are experiences in which one is brought face to face with the reality of God's love in Christ in a new and altogether challenging way. They can occur like it did for Dr. Loder, in the collision of metal on bone, or they can occur in the quiet scream of a mind's unrest. It is at these points that we by faith either affirm God's presence in our midst, and are transformed, or we reject his presence and fall even more deeply into our own coping patterns of despair. Convictional experiences, whenever and wherever they occur, are grounded in the real spiritual struggle between the Spirit of Christ working within us to redeem, and the human spirit reacting within us to seek self-preservation. Self-preservation is nothing more than the vain attempt to maintain our own self-centeredness in the face of a love even greater than ourselves (cf. Jonah).

The tendency to repress these experiences through rational explanations or flimsy platitudes about life causes us even more trouble. Psychology and the human sciences can only go so far in their account of convictional experience because, as Loder describes, they have not gone far enough in their account of real life changing experience. Loder backs up this claim with a penetrating critique of the foundations of psychoanalytic theory and a substantial look at theories of knowledge. Though one may differ with his treatment, it is difficult to argue with his conclusion: what is needed in the human sciences is a coherent logic of transformation.

The Logic of Transformation

Transformation is the key to human growth and renewal and the coordinating principal of convictional experience. In Christian theology, we are well familiar with the idea transformation — it is at the very heart of the Gospel. Jesus Christ, God's own Son, entered into human life so that he might transform our broken lives and heal them, offering them back to the Father renewed. Baptism, rebirth, and sanctification are all ways of talking about the same reality of human transformation through which Christ's Spirit transforms and restores human life. Even creation itself testifies to God's transformational purpose (Rom. 8). Convictional experiences, however, can only become transformational when it is acknowledged that the Spirit of Christ enters into the human condition to bring wholeness and spiritual renewal. The logic of transformation thus affirms,

rather than denies, the presence of God in the midst of life's challenges.

Dr. Loder poignantly illustrates this position by offering real-life cases of transformation from his own experiences as a counselor. In each case he carefully shows how the counselee, after acknowledging the presence of Christ in the dilemma, was subsequently freed to choose redemption rather than repression. Seen in this light, transformation, rather than being a temporary loss of one's senses, is the eternal purpose of God in Christ.

Transformation and Ministry

It is Loder's affirmation about transformation that makes him such an invaluable resource for theologians and ministers. In a recent review of his latest book, *The Logic of the Spirit*, T.F. Torrance has this to say:

What strikes me, perhaps above all, is the depth of Loder's compassion, which informs all his analytical and therapeutic thought about relationality between the human spirit and the divine Spirit. No writer or thinker, to my knowledge, has penetrated so deeply, illuminatingly, lovingly, or convincingly into the often tortured tangles of the human spirit, at different stages of its development, and brought to bear upon it the creative and healing presence of the divine that characterizes the logic of the Spirit.³

This is a powerful testimony from a theologian who, in his own right, has added much to our understanding of the Gospel in light of the dualisms inherent in human science. What Torrance recognizes here is that Dr. Loder is a theologian whose work is redefining how we think about ministry.

In *The Transforming Moment* and his other more recent works (*The Knight's Move*, and *The Logic of the Spirit*), Loder argues convincingly for the central role of the Holy Spirit in ministry. This is by no means a new idea, but Loder's approach is remarkably fresh. The role of the Holy Spirit in theology and ministry has often been misunderstood. A quick survey of the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit shows at least neglect (in the early creeds) and at best underdevelopment (in modern theology).⁴ Thus it is no surprise that Loder summarizes the doctrine like this: "the inner nature of the Spirit is neglected in deference to the outward activity and mission of the Spirit and the church, and personal participation in the Spirit is virtually anathema among major theologians."⁵

Transformation, the essential element in human development, takes place at the intersection of the human spirit and Holy Spirit, yet little teaching in ministry or theology directs us to this understanding. Instead of thinking about ministry in terms of applied theology, Loder challenges the whole direction of modern theological study and its inadequate understanding of the Spirit. Instead of thinking about theology in terms of knowledge, Loder asks us whether our understanding of knowledge is properly centered in Christ and the transforming role of the Spirit. In short, Loder shows us that ministry and theology are mutually interdependent functions of the ministry of Christ. If we agree that the Spirit is present and active in this world, and if we agree that the human spirit is constantly being called to respond to the Spirit's transformational power, then our understanding of ministry and theology must be transformed as well.

Until ministers begin to think about ministry in terms of God's transforming presence *already present in the midst of human life*, their ministries will continue to be ineffective. Our preaching and teaching, counseling, and interaction with all people must be seen as an extension of Christ's ministry *already present and active* within the life of all God's people. The temptation to explain things about God, rather than recognize and affirm the Spirit's presence *already active within* human life, is a serious error in our theology. On the other hand, until theologians begin to think about theology in terms of spiritual transformation and renewal, their theology will continue to be useless for doing ministry. The reason why there exists such a chasm between ministry and theology is precisely due to the fact that theologians, by and large, do not think of themselves as ministers. Theology is practically a self-sustaining academic exercise, yet what is desperately needed in ministry is sound theology. Ministry and theology are interdependent activities of the same Spirit working within and upon the human spirit in transformation.

This is why James Loder is so critical for the practice of ministry and the discipline of theology. Throughout his work, Loder affirms the basic claim of the church that a proper understanding of transformation and renewal begins with Holy Spirit. In his life and in this theology, Loder offers insight into the very depths of the Holy Spirit and its regenerative claim

upon all human life. I must echo the words of T. F. Torrance, it is difficult to think of any Christian thinker in recent years who has such a powerful grasp of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Loder states this in the preface to *The Transforming Moment* (1980) but reaffirms this basic assumption in *The Knight's Move* (1992).

2. For a detailed discussion on the relationship that Loder sees between the human sciences and theology read *The Knight's Move*.

3. The Princeton Seminary Bulletin, vol. xx, no. 3, 1999, p. 317.

4. Loder discusses this in depth in the second chapter 'The Holy Spirit and Human Spirit: A Brief Historical Perspective,' of *The Knight's Move*, pp. 19-33. It is developed further in *The Logic of the Spirit*.

5. *Knight's Move*, pp. 20.

Loder on Kierkegaard

by Matt Frawley

Prior to my middler year here at Princeton Seminary, I had no idea who Søren Kierkegaard was. Today it is no act of hyperbole to say that he has been, is and will be one of the most influential people in my life. I would even classify him as one of my spiritual mentors, a discipler of sorts. Yes, you read me correctly; Kierkegaard is, can and should be a Christian spiritual guide.

In my social circle of Christians, people are often surprised to hear me claim that Kierkegaard *was* a Christian. Wasn't he that existentialist guy, partly responsible for undermining the authority of the Bible? I always relish those opportunities to pull out one of Kierkegaard's religious works and read a few lines to my incredulous interlocutor. I distinctly remember one occasion in which a Christian brother sat across the table from me mouth agape as I read to him one of Kierkegaard's prayers. Yes, Kierkegaard was a Christian whose writings were devoted to drawing others into a wholly submissive and joyous walk with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps you reject that claim. You have dabbled in the secondary literature and side with the many who claim Kierkegaard was a Heideggerian or Sartrean existentialist. Or, if you are really trendy, you view Kierkegaard as a proto-postmodernist. But to take either of these positions you must be willing to maintain, like Mark C. Taylor in *Kierkegaard's Pseudonymous Authorship*, that Kierkegaard's pseudonymous writings, not his religious writings, are central to his authorship.¹ It is a bold claim, if for no other reason

than Kierkegaard explicitly states the contrary in *Point of View for My Work as an Author*.² While many commentators refer to the religious writings, the majority of their citations come from Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works, which, although thick with Christian terminology, also contain enough of Kierkegaard's renowned irony to provide commentators the latitude to conscript Kierkegaard to their own agendas. The result: Kierkegaard begins to sound a lot like Jacques Derrida or even George Lindbeck.³

While this recent trend lauds the "postmodern" aspects of Kierkegaard, earlier Kierkegaard Scholarship censured Kierkegaard for divorcing faith from reason. Here Kierkegaard is portrayed as a Danish Romanticist who pitted Christianity against reason by calling Christianity irrational, a "leap of faith." Given our evidentialist understanding of what this must mean, we interpret Kierkegaard as almost flaunting his belief in Christianity in the absence of evidence.⁴

Recently, however, C. Stephen Evans has indefatigably championed Kierkegaard as a defender of the positive relationship between faith and reason. In one article, he even argues that Kierkegaard's views are similar to Alvin Plantinga's notion of belief in God as properly basic.⁵ While Evans is right to see the similarity, since, like Plantinga, Kierkegaard eschews

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evidentialism, this article is more interesting for what it does not say. Evans misses the central thrust of Kierkegaard's entire authorship. He does not see that Kierkegaard's writings crystallize around one central point, that God alone is the good that we ultimately need and should seek. So while we can talk about how it is "rational" to have belief in God as properly basic, and not based on other foundations, we must ask how that belief arrived in the first place.⁶ Kierkegaard argues that although we have the ability to realize the existence of God apart from special revelation, true belief in God comes through a personal appropriation of the good Christianity offers in Jesus Christ. Whatever forays Kierkegaard makes into epistemology are not for the sake of epistemology itself but are the outworking of his quest to understand what authentic Christian faith is in terms of the good that it offers.

Kierkegaard had the audacity to believe that we are beings created for a relationship with God, and apart from that relationship we experience anxiety and despair. Because every human is created for

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Kierkegaard's Christian point of
view better than anyone else.***

this relationship and because we are all products of hereditary sin, as he would call it, we all experience anxiety and despair whether we are conscious of it or not. It was his stated intention that by creating two parallel sets of writings, one pseudonymous and the other religious, he would endeavor to awaken a largely spiritless Danish society to their *need* for Christ. Like Pascal, Kierkegaard felt that he must combat the indifference of his fellow countrymen before presenting the good that Christianity offers. Unlike Pascal, Kierkegaard did not appeal to the mind directly but employed irony and other literary devices, to, dare I say it, deconstruct the illusions of his time that further entrenched people in their complacency towards the Gospel. He wanted to draw people into a subjective, reflective stance in which they would ponder their base assumptions about the meaning and purpose of life. In this way, he hoped to lead them into an existential crisis in

which they might realize that the good upon which they had structured and ordered their lives was not the true, lasting, and constant good they ultimately needed. God alone is the good, the one thing needful. It is only in yielding our lives to His will every moment that we can enjoy God's fellowship.⁷

The question is: how does James Loder fit into all this? Simply put, Loder has understood and applied Kierkegaard's Christian point of view better than anyone else.

Let me tell you a story. During the fall semester of my middler year, I took Dr. Loder's developmental psychology course and my life has never been the same. It was if every class was a new epiphany, Dr. Loder time and again giving definitions and explanations to intuitions and experiences I had had in my own walk with Christ. Loder is no reductionist; these were not analyses that distilled my spiritual experiences down to psychological projections or the product of social conditioning. No, here was a man who appreciated what he calls our inherent *self-relationality* and our intended *relationality with God* through Jesus Christ; here was a man actually talking about our *need* to walk in the Spirit; and here was a man suggesting that Kierkegaard got it right.

It was in that class that I first heard about Kierkegaard, and what I learned there is why I am still here at PTS writing a dissertation on the relationship between his religious and pseudonymous writings.

Kierkegaard and Loder on Self-Relationality

So what has Loder seen in Kierkegaard that so many have overlooked? The opening pages of his latest book, *The Logic of the Spirit*, offer us a great clue. Loder asks, "Why do we live? Why do we cherish life with such passion?"⁸ The answer is crucial for understanding not only Loder's work but that of Kierkegaard as well. It is what he calls self-relationality or, as he states it, "the finite, irreducibly self-transcendent and self-relational character of the human spirit."⁹

To spell out what he means we must jump over to Kierkegaard and speak about his understanding of self-relationality. While Kierkegaard developed his theory of self-relationality relatively early in his career, his fullest expression of this concept comes in the opening paragraph of *Sickness Unto Death*. In a

dense but rewarding passage, Kierkegaard writes:

A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation's relating itself to itself in the relation; the self is not the relation but is the relations' relating itself to itself.¹⁰

What we must not miss here is the inherently *dynamic* nature of the human spirit. According to Kierkegaard, each and every human is a spirit that *relates* to itself. Now the English translation of this verb "relate," *Forholder sig*, is consistent with the tense of the Danish: *present indicative*. By using this tense, Kierkegaard emphasizes that we are *always* relating to ourselves; it is an ongoing activity that is happening right now in you and me. It is not an activity that we begin later in life when ethical issues become important, nor is it an activity that we *should* initiate because we *can*.¹¹ Rather we are always relating to ourselves, even when we are not aware of this activity. This dynamic activity within us defines us as spirit. We do not at some later point in life *become* "religious," spiritual, or single individuals. We are spirit from the start.¹²

Loder shows that for Kierkegaard this inherent self-relationality establishes a *need* within us that distinguishes us from the rest of creation. Because we always relate to ourselves, we are always asking and telling ourselves who or what we are, and this activity gives rise to our continual struggle to derive meaning and fulfillment in our lives. While the rest of creation serves God immediately in that it can never question its existence, humans have the unique ability to ponder what it means to be human.

The implications of this claim are clear in Kierkegaard's *Christian Discourses* where he expounds Matthew 6. In the first section, Kierkegaard examines a series of what he calls pagan concerns: the care of poverty, abundance, lowliness, loftiness, presumptuousness, and self-torment. The birds and lilies are not tempted by these concerns simply because they cannot have them. The birds are "immediately qualified," responding immediately to external stimuli. Kierkegaard writes, "The bird, well, if it is rich, it is ignorant of being rich ... The ignorant bird is innocently aware of nothing ... The ignorant bird lives like a sleepwalker in the power of sleep; it sees nothing."¹³

Christians and pagans, because they are human, are able to have these concerns, but the Christian must *become* like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field by not "having them." In other words, a Christian must renounce these "pagan" concerns by trusting God to provide all physical needs while he or she "seeks first God's kingdom and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

The bird is nothing more or less than a bird. It always does what a bird *should* do, what God intended it to do. A human, on the other hand, has the freedom to disobey, to act in such a way that is less than human, and through such choices, show that it sees itself differently than God desires. Because we are self-relational, we can see ourselves apart from God's will for us. This is why Kierkegaard writes in *Sickness Unto Death* that the dynamic of self-relationality is freedom. Even though Kierkegaard maintains that we are a "derived relation," the very fact that we relate ourselves to ourselves gives us a freedom the rest of creation does not enjoy.¹⁴

Kierkegaard's religious writings make clear why he stresses our freedom and the power of choice. Because we are always relating to ourselves, these decisions reveal or manifest our inner being. Because we are always acting, every decision has an import beyond what we necessarily ascribe to it. In contrast to Arnold Come, who wants to focus only on major life decisions that may come about a few times in our lives, Kierkegaard points to the utter mundane occurrences of our lives as potentially full of opportunity.¹⁵ With every decision related to our moment by moment existence, we decide, choose, move, and leap based upon our passions. Instead of seeing passions as chaotic and unpredictable, Kierkegaard argues that our passions flow out of how we relate to ourselves. As David Gouwens puts it, Kierkegaard's work with passions is an effort to provide "a map of the human heart, a logic of emotions, articulating patterns of motion, belief, and emotion, plotting their mutual interrelationships."¹⁶ What Gouwens misses, however, is that the passions are defined by our self-relationality and resultant search for eternal, lasting happiness. As Loder points out, because we are self-relational, happiness corresponds to our quest for self-identity. Because we always relate to ourselves, we are always attempting to define ourselves, maintain a definition of ourselves,

or redefine ourselves. In other words, we are constantly on the quest for meaning, significance, and happiness in this life, and this is why, to answer Loder's question, we live and "cherish life with such passion."

Whether conscious of the struggle or not, everyone wrestles at the core of their being with what is the good for them. Kierkegaard's strategy was to expose this struggle by creating an existential crisis in which the reader of his works would first come to see his or her power of choice. Many have stopped here and thus see Kierkegaard's emphasis on the power of choice and freedom as a form of volitionism: we can will any belief to be true without regard for the grounds of our belief.¹⁷

But it is important to remember Kierkegaard's overarching goal of bringing people into a state of consciousness in which they may properly appropriate the true and eternal good Christianity offers. His focus on the importance of choice is not in isolation from this Christian endeavor, but naturally flows out of his understanding of self-relationality. It is not choice alone that is important but how an individual *experiences* choice that is critical.

To clarify this experience, Kierkegaard also uses the term *motion*. Every choice is a *movement* of the will, which results in, as John Caputo puts it, an "existential version of *kinesis*."¹⁸ Because the self is constantly relating to itself, and because each person is constantly making choices, the self is constantly in motion. Amidst the flux of human, temporal existence, moreover, each movement of the will has ramifications for self-definition and self-understanding.

Loder appreciates the significance of Kierkegaard's point here better than any other Kierkegaard interpreter does, even Caputo. In *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith*, Loder avoids any volitionist understanding of Kierkegaard by showing that what was critical for Kierkegaard was not motion in itself but motion as the experience of power. To show why this is an important point for a proper interpretation of Kierkegaard, Loder first works with Kierkegaard's understanding of consciousness as a way of seeing reality and viewing oneself in that reality. As Loder shows in his analysis of Kierkegaard, consciousness is not a fixed entity.

The individual can actually reconfigure itself so it comes to see reality and itself in various ways. A person's consciousness could be "aesthetically" qualified, "objective" to itself, unaware of itself and its need for self-fulfillment. But the individual's perception of reality can be reconfigured. In this case, the self is aware that the power of choice, and the actions made, will influence consciousness.¹⁹ This observation of Kierkegaard leads to Loder's fundamental belief that how we perceive ourselves influences how we perceive and experience motion in ourselves.

This way of understanding motion leads to a different interpretation of Kierkegaard. It is often assumed that Kierkegaard's efforts at indirect communication

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were solely meant to awaken people to their powers of action. While this is no doubt true, it is incomplete. If Kierkegaard's theory of motion is not further developed, one could be left with the impression that Kierkegaard wanted nothing more than for people simply to become aware of themselves and thus more responsible or ethical in their actions. The religious literature makes clear, however, that Kierkegaard believes that actions manifest the heart or the "inner being."²⁰ In other words, the condition of our heart determines our fundamental presuppositions about ourselves, God, and what is meaningful, significant, and good. Our "inner being" constantly expresses (presses out) itself through our actions. By awakening to our actions, by becoming *conscious* of ourselves, we thus awaken to our "inner beings" where lay the true issues of life. Kierkegaard's endeavor to awaken people to themselves is therefore not simply to make people realize their powers of action but to expose their *need* for self-definition and meaning in life and thus ultimately to make them *conscious* of their need for God.

Commentators like David Gouwens and Jamie Ferreira have endeavored to overcome the volitionist interpretation of Kierkegaard by highlighting the importance of imagination in Kierkegaard's work.²¹ Ferreira in particular has sought to demonstrate Kierkegaard's understanding of the role of imagination in relation to the will (and even claims that her work is the first to do so, which makes one wonder whether she read Loder's *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith*). In her book, *Transforming Vision*, Ferreira endeavors to show the precise way in which the imagination functions in the leaps between various stages of existence. To do this she wants to challenge the standard way of interpreting Kierkegaard's understanding of the leap and transition such that there is a balance between active and passive elements in the self. Although she claims that her position is not anti-volitionist, she equates the leap with a gestalt-like change in perspective.²² As Stephen Emmanuel and Arnold Come rightly argue, although there is a need to see the positive role of the imagination in Kierkegaard's work, it is simply wrong to equate the two.²³

Loder, in contrast, gives a more balanced interpretation of Kierkegaard's understanding of the imagination's role in determining the will. In *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith*, Loder keys in on Kierkegaard's approval of Fichte's concept of the productive imagination and the categories of thought. By this reference, Jim Loder shows that Kierkegaard believed the imagination to be the organ of the self that links the *function* and *focus* of consciousness. The focus of consciousness is the object to which consciousness gives its attention. The function of consciousness is its activity of forming a context, the not-I or "reality," in which the object of its focus is ascribed meaning. This ascription or "functioning-in-focus" flows out of the way the self perceives itself in reality, so movement and the possibilities of movement are established in the context the self pre-determines for itself.²⁴

Furthermore, it is a movement of the self, or projection of the self, which ascribes value or meaning to the object. Part of the error of "aesthetic" existence, in which there is no definitive, existential awareness of the self, is that truth and meaning are blandly objective. It does not realize that the meaning of life it maintains is an arbitrary construction on its part.²⁵ Loder's discussion of the "lived world"

in *Transforming Moment* helps us understand the importance of this relation between the self, the world-view it creates for itself, and the will. The "lived world" is a creation of what Loder in *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith*, calls reality consciousness. Each of us has a fundamental need to have reality mean something and for us to be meaningful in that world. As Loder writes, "One's 'world' is spontaneously projected, and sustained by the primordial need to live in a unified, comprehensive, and meaningful context."²⁶ From the materialist day-trader to the mystic, every individual engages in this process of projection through the creative power of the imagination. Because we project meaning onto various objects and events in life, differences can arise between people and even throughout an individual's own history as to what is meaningful. To some the pursuit and attainment of social acceptance and prestige through the accumulation of wealth is the "good life", while others find that the things of this world prove meaningless. In both cases, a "lived world" provides the parameters by which deliberation leads to action.

Loder's extension of Kierkegaard's point here about a created context should not be seen as supporting an anti-realist position. Loder and Kierkegaard both affirm the reality of objects apart from us. Their concern is rather with how we ascribe meaning to those objects and events that transpire before us. Specifically, Loder's focus on Kierkegaard's understanding of imagination points to one fundamental result of our sinfulness. Although we are unique in the created world because we can create "lived worlds," we misuse this creativity in our sinfulness. There is one, true reality in which God alone is the good, but we in our pride believe reality to be otherwise. Because we do not, like Jesus, see obedience to God's will as our only true spiritual food (John 4:34-35), we say that the true good is found in earthly pursuits like the accumulation of wealth and social prestige. Furthermore, because we do not want to face the reality of our sinfulness, we create for ourselves false "lived worlds," or illusions, in which we can remain indifferent to God.

However, because this point of view or reality-consciousness is tractable, it can change when it proves existentially inadequate. This is Loder's way of interpreting Kierkegaard's theory of the stages of existence. Each world-view or reality consciousness

is a resolution of the need within the self, who is both part of the world-view and stands outside of that world-view as its generator, to define itself. When that point of view proves inadequate, the self creatively reconstructs its world so as to overcome the possibility that the world has no meaning and that the self is not meaningful.

The Transformation of the Self by the Holy Spirit

Why is this such a threat to the self? Why does the self ever feel the need to reconstruct reality for itself? Why does Kierkegaard even have a hierarchy of stages? Oddly enough, these questions are not really dealt with in Kierkegaard scholarship, which points again to the uniqueness of Loder's work with Kierkegaard. Specifically, Dr. Loder shows that Kierkegaard's understanding of self-relationality points to the second fundamental relationship within the self. Because each of us is always relating to the self, we are constantly asking ourselves what is the ground or meaning of our existence. Our projection of a world-view is an answer to that, yet, as Kierkegaard maintains, we are a derived relation. We have not created ourselves and so any attempt to define ourselves by our own efforts is doomed to fail. Any reality consciousness that does not appropriate the fact that we are a derived creation is thereby existentially inadequate and leads Loder to talk about the void of existence. In *Transforming Moment*, for example, Loder observes how we constantly fight against the possibility of our own non-existence, and makes a critical insight here that is fundamental to understanding Kierkegaard's whole authorship. Loder writes, "We always have difficulty composing out or covering over the nothingness because it is not merely 'out there,' it is embedded in the very heart of the untransformed self."²⁷ The self is caught in the continual struggle for meaning against its own nothingness, yet it does not realize that it is powerless to overcome the void because it is "nothing before God," as Kierkegaard puts it.

Kierkegaard wanted each individual to realize his or her power of choice because then he or she might realize, as he states in *Concept of Anxiety*, "that he can demand absolutely nothing of life and that the *terrible, perdition, and annihilation* live next door to every man."²⁸ In this acute existential crisis, a person might come to the realization that his or

her pursuit of happiness apart from God must come to nothing because he or she is nothing before God. In fact, it was this existential state that Kierkegaard wanted people to enter, for only then could they die to themselves and live in Christ (Matthew 16:24-26, Luke 17:33). Throughout his religious writings, Kierkegaard constantly emphasizes our need to see ourselves as nothing before God, an extension of his phenomenological out-working of the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.²⁹ Because we are created out of nothing, our sinfulness is the futile attempt of that which is nothing trying to make itself something. It is to seek meaning apart from that which alone can give meaning. Only when we realize this at the very core of our being, our inner being, can we have the humility to die to ourselves and conform our wills to God's will and in that process come to enjoy God's presence in His constant, eternal love.

To return to Loder's point about motion as the experience of power, only when we yield ourselves to God and use our will power to die to our want of self-assertion, can we experience what Paul talks about in Galatians 2:20 and what Kierkegaard and Loder call dialectical identity.³⁰ Through the process of transformation, in which we realize the futile

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ity and sinfulness of our own efforts at true self-identity and yield ourselves to the power of the Spirit to reconstitute us in Christ, we can experience movement as Paul did. Instead of movement remaining the manifestation of the power of our own self-assertion, it becomes the experience of the awareness of the Holy Spirit working in us, using us as His willing instruments of love in a broken world. As Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (NIV). This is Kierkegaard's hope and intent of his writings. In the beginning of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard prays,

How could one speak properly about love if you were forgotten, you God of love, source of all love in heaven and on earth...so that one who loves is what he is only by being in you!...How could one speak properly of love if you were forgotten, you Spirit of love, who take nothing of your own but remind us of that love-sacrifice, remind the believer to love as he is loved and his neighbor as himself!³¹

This prayer is often forgotten in the secondary literature on Kierkegaard. Commentator after commentator looks to *Works of Love* as Kierkegaard's great work on Christian ethics. All too often, these commentators discuss this work without grasping Kierkegaard's point that we cannot fulfill God's command to love others in our own strength. It takes this dialectical identity in which we are consciously aware of our nothingness and yet in which we experience the power and life of the Holy Spirit moving through us to love another human as God wants. For Kierkegaard this act of submission can only come about if we first love ourselves and see that God alone is the good that we ultimately seek. We must relinquish control over our lives and "lived worlds" so that we can know God's love "that surpasses knowledge" and that we "may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (NIV). It is

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only then, when we are filled with the Spirit, that we will not seek to manipulate our environment, our "lived world," in order to derive meaning for ourselves. Because we have already found meaning in Christ, in our relationship with God, we are free from the need to manipulate others and free to become the ministers of Christ we were created to be.

This is what Loder sees in Kierkegaard, and he is absolutely right. We are beings created to seek hap-

piness. We do not seek happiness every once in awhile. The pursuit is, as George Price puts it, "as permanent and unavoidable as breathing."³² We are creatures who act out of our pursuit of the good and have resolved upon a way of seeing reality in which a certain understanding of what is the good is presumed. Because we always relate to ourselves, we are always engaged with the issue of self-identity and the need for meaning in our lives. We may not be aware of this need but the need is still present in our "inner being." This need is fulfilled only in a proper, intimate God-relationship. In *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits* Kierkegaard states, "His intimacy surrounds you everywhere; it is offered to you at every moment: in this intimacy in the decision you are with the good."³³ The one thing needful is God's presence in our lives, the very thing we reject in our sinfulness.

If we are self-relational, if we are constantly trying to figure out who we are, choices and decisions made when the self does not fully comprehend itself will prove existentially inadequate and manipulative of one's environment. In other words, because the self is spirit, any conception of the self through which the individual acts that takes him or her as less than spirit, cannot be existentially satisfying. In such a case, an individual must rely on the "lived world" or itself to provide meaning, both of which prove unfulfilling because the self itself is nothing before God and so cannot provide that infinite, constant happiness it needs. When the self sees itself properly without distortion, then, and only then, can it experience harmony, peace, and rest in its daily, predominately mundane, activities. Only when we are consciously aware of ourselves as nothing before God can we have the humility and contrition to yield ourselves to God and allow Him to define us, to reconstruct our identity, in His love.

By becoming subjective and thus turning inward to the issues of the heart a person becomes increasingly aware of his or her need for a constant in life which assures meaning and significance amid the vagaries and multiplicity of human existence. As Kierkegaard writes in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "an eternal happiness is a question only for the impassioned, infinitely interested subjectivity."³⁴ In *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard writes that this eternal happiness is to remain in God's love. The joy and hope of the Christian life is as Paul states in Romans 8 that

nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (NIV). When we see ourselves as defined by God’s love, then we will find fulfillment and then we can be God’s agents in a broken world. This is Dr. Loder’s profound hope for each of his students and what he saw at work in Kierkegaard personally. For your writings on Kierkegaard and for your influence in my own life, thank you Dr. Loder.

1 Mark C. Taylor *Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975): 19-21.

2 Søren Kierkegaard *Point of View*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).

3 Roger Poole *Kierkegaard The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia). Steven M. Emmanuel *Kierkegaard & The Concept of Revelation* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996).

4 Brand Blanshard “Kierkegaard on Faith” *Personalist* (1968). Alistair MacIntyre *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

5 C. Stephen Evans, “Kierkegaard and Plantinga on Belief in God: Subjectivity as the Ground of Properly Basic Religious Beliefs” in *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol. 5, NO.1 (January 1988): 25-39.

6 Those of you with an interest in this debate are well served by reading Diogenes Allen’s *Reasonableness of Faith* in which he argues for the reasonableness of faith simply on the grounds of responding to the good Christianity offers.

7 One of Kierkegaard most often quoted Scripture verses was Luke 10:42 in which Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen “the one thing needful.” The clearest statement of Kierkegaard’s understanding of the relation between our wills and God’s see “The Changelessness of God” in *The Moment and Late Writings*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998): 263-281

8 James E. Loder *The Logic of the Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998): 3.

9 Loder (1998): 14.

10 Søren Kierkegaard *Sickness Unto Death*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980): 13.

11 Bruce H. Kirmmse *Kierkegaard in Golden Age Denmark* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990): 360.

12 Søren Kierkegaard *Works of Love*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995): 209.

13 Søren Kierkegaard *Christian Discourses*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997): 35.

14 *Sickness Unto Death*: 29.

15 Arnold B. Come *Kierkegaard as Humanist* (Buffalo, New York: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995): 50.

16 David J. Gouwens *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 77.

17 Louis Pojman *The Logic of Subjectivity* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1984).

18 John D. Caputo *Radical Hermeneutics* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987): 11.

19 Loder (1966): 89-91.

20 Even Kierkegaard’s more popular *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* points to this dynamic. Søren Kierkegaard *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992): 609-610.

21 David Gouwens *Kierkegaard’s Dialectic of Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Incorporated: 1989). M Jamie Ferreira *Transforming Vision* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1991).

22 Ferreira (1991): 15, 17, 35, 56, 65, 106, 125

23 Steven M. Emmanuel *Kierkegaard & The Concept of Revelation* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1996): 81-93; Come (1995): 154.

24 Loder (1966): 129-132. James Loder *Transforming Moment* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers & Howard, 1989): 71-75.

25 Loder (1966): 145.

26 Loder (1989): 71.

27 Loder (1989): 81.

28 Søren Kierkegaard *Concept of Anxiety*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980): 156. Emphasis added.

29 Søren Kierkegaard *Judge For Yourself*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990): 114-115; Søren Kierkegaard *Concept of Irony*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989): 309; *Works of Love*: 102-103, 120.

30 James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt *The Knight's Move* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Helmers & Howard, 1992): 188-189, 191, 236, 284. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: 572.

31 *Works of Love*: 3-4.

32 George Price *The Narrow Pass* (New York: Hutchinson & Company, 1963): 118.

33 Søren Kierkegaard *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*. Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993): 107. Emphasis added.

34 *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*: 32.

“One Spirit” with the Lord

Insights from James Loder’s Theological Anthropology

by F. LeRon Shults

In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul tells us that “the person who is joined to the Lord becomes *one spirit* with him.” This text draws us into a nexus of doctrinal issues in theological anthropology, christology, pneumatology and soteriology, and raises practical concerns about the outworking of Christian life. Building on insights from James Loder’s work¹ that overlap these and other theological issues, this paper explores the implications of the apostle’s claim about the relational unity that constitutes the individual Christian’s identity with Christ. What does it mean for a *finite* temporal human being to become “one spirit” [*hen pneuma*] with the *infinite* eternal Lord? Paul is clearly not referring merely to some remote eschatological existence, but to the person here on earth who is currently linked to Christ. But how can I really be *one* with God without losing my own identity? This essay outlines a philosophical anthropological model that may help us articulate the Christian vision of a person who is being transformed by the regenerative work of the Spirit of Christ.

The possibility of spiritual union with God strikes a deep chord within us – we desperately long for such an intimate “oneness.” Yet... at the same time, the idea of getting so close to God may also be frightening. Will this new identification with God mean I am dissolved into God? Will I still be “me”? To the Galatians (2:20), Paul says that his relation to the Lord is one in which “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”² We are bound to wonder: how can it be “I” living and “Christ” living

at the same time? How can I retain my identity, be my “self,” while being so related to an infinite “Other” that we are “one spirit”? How can the divine *Spiritus Creator* and the human creaturely spirit become *one*? If the Spirit of God is the determinative force in my life (the source of my actions and identity), then what space does that leave for my little human spirit?

An Interdisciplinary Strategy

This article is an exercise in philosophical theology—thinking through the truth conditions of theological claims in dialogue with the relevant conceptual sciences.³ It explores the relation between the structural dynamics of the intrinsic human longing for a secure identity (outlined by philosophical and cultural anthropology) and the Christian theological articulation of the experience of finding true identity outside of oneself in Christ (outlined by philosophical theology). From the anthropological direction, we will examine the claim that all cultures exhibit embedded patterns of meaning that reflect a longing for a transformation of identity—a radical transformation that reconstitutes the existential and social situation of the individual. From the theological direction, I will argue that these patterns serve as a heuristic lens to clarify the patterns of transformation in the doctrine of regeneration by the Spirit of

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Jesus Christ, and (conversely) that the operation of this re-generation (or con-verting) of the individual identity in Christ is the ultimate fulfillment to which the various proximate cultural transformations point.⁴

Let me state the thesis even more strongly: the longing for unity with the divine that one finds in the various myths of world cultures, in the structures of human self-consciousness, and in philosophical reflection on metaphysics, is ultimately fulfilled by the spiritual regeneration of the Christian, who becomes "one spirit" with the Lord. The anthropological analysis points toward a fulfillment in the theological domain, while the theological doctrine discloses the creaturely integrity of anthropological self-understanding. I will suggest a specific way of defending the scriptural language about the relation of Holy Spirit to human spirit as both coherent and experientially adequate. The goal is not to "prove" a Christian doctrine based on neutral foundations, along the lines of the older "natural theology," but simply to present the explanatory power of the Christian claims about Jesus Christ as the transformer of human identity. My strategy is to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophical and cultural anthropology, which attempt within their own disciplinary guidelines to describe the nature and structure of the human struggle or longing to be united to the divine.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of the founders of cultural anthropology, has argued that there are "deep structures" underlying myths or transformational stories in *all* cultures. (The term "myth" here is used not as synonym for "untrue" but in the technical sense as the ultimate explanation a culture gives for *social and cosmic order*). He makes the startling claim that, despite *material* differences, every myth (considered as an aggregate of all its variants) corresponds to the formula below.⁵

$$f_x(a) : f_y(b) :: f_x(b) : f_a^{-1}(y)$$

Here he has adopted the language of mathematics and set-theoretic function theory in order to represent the *logical* relations that inhere within the

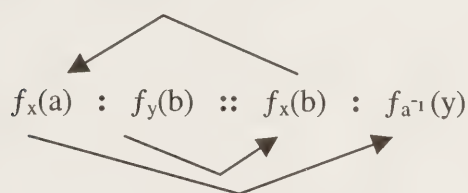
dynamics of human transformation, as expressed in cultural myths and folklore. The terms in parentheses (a, b, y) are "agents" in the story; the subscripts (x, y, a⁻¹) represent events or forms of existence (domains) in which they are placed. Lévi-Strauss suggests that human beings in *all cultures*⁶ appear to have a built-in openness and longing for a mediator (b), or an agent who is a savior, who can mediate the opposition of two existence-spheres (f_x and f_y). These spheres are different in every story – they may represent, e.g., male and female, yin and yang, land and water, or human and divine life, etc. By engaging these structural dynamics of transformation identified by anthropological research, I hope to show how the Spirit of Christ illuminates and fulfills the longing for a mediator who can transform the human spirit and create a new "dialectical identity." Following Loder, this is the term I will use for the scriptural concept of "I, yet not I, but Christ."

An important aspect of set-theoretic functions necessary for understanding why Lévi-Strauss used this apparatus, and how it can serve as a heuristic device for us as well, is the fact that each set of symbols $f_{()}$ [i.e., a function sign with a subscript and a term], mathematicians think of as "*one*" or a "*unity*;" this new unity refers to the object or situation that results when the agent term (a or b) enters into or is acted on by the "event-existence" associated with the subscript (indexed as x and y). The formula could be read like this: "function sub-x of a is to function sub-y of b as function sub-x of b is to function sub-a(inverse) of y." In the opposition of f_x and f_y , typically the former is "negative" in the story, while the latter is "positive."

It is critical to note that the mediator must operate in *both* spheres. $f_x(b)$ is called the "negative" function of the mediator, because it negates the negative dilemma of the protagonist. Following Loder again, we will use the term "double negation."⁷ The transformation effected by the mediator results in a new kind of identity [$f_a^{-1}(y)$], in which the original agent (a) is "inverted" and becomes a function of the *positive* action (y) of the mediator. A permutation (change of place) is noted; what was a function (y) becomes an agent, what was an agent (a) becomes a function. A theoretical mathematician would say that the agent is "*hypostasized* in the domain" (a phrase that is at least suggestive for potential dialogue with

Christology!). Because we are talking about stories, these “domains” denote modes of agential existence. If we believe that God created the proportional structures of the universe and the patterns reflected in the intelligibility of human consciousness (embodied first in the mathematical intuitions of small children), then it should not come as a shock that the dynamics of regeneration produced by the Holy Spirit would fulfill the longing of our created spirits, which are embedded in the proportionality of spatio-temporal existence.

Harvard anthropologists Elli and Pierre Maranda⁸ expanded Lévi-Strauss’ model by adding arrows to the formula:



They wanted to move beyond a *linear* or purely synchronic analysis, arguing that the mathematical analogy (A is to B as C is to D) only goes so far. They emphasize the diachronic or dynamic dimensions of transformation by adding arrows. This illustrates the “twists” that we find in actual myths. With this new linguistic or syntactic dimension, so to speak, the formulaic design now provides us a tool for mapping the “grammar” of transformation, which takes place in real historical time.

The crucial point here is that *all* cultures seem to be a built-in recognition that for a real transformation involving *gain* in the true identity of an individual to occur, the transforming event must follow the formulaic pattern; the gain on the part of the original agent (a) involves the *ongoing influence* of the positive domain (y) of the mediator (b) *after the negation* of his or her negative existence in the original domain (x).

Spiritual Union with God?

Cultural stories often evince these structural dynamics when describing the transformation of an individual’s identity from, e.g., unmarried to married, or low class to high class. However, what would such a transformation of identity look like if f_x represented the broken finitude of the human spirit and f_y represented the infinitude of the life of the Spirit of God? Our answer to this question will

be shaped by our understanding of biblical language, which sometimes speaks of the Spirit as “*indwelling*” (or “*infusing*”) the Christian, and other times as a “*paraclete*,” one who is called alongside. I will return to this hermeneutical question in a later section.

Let me back up for a moment and paint in broad strokes the background against which we can understand the scope and complexity of this issue: How can *two* qualitatively different beings, human spirit and Divine Spirit, be united into *one*? This issue of “spiritual unity” is a conceptual problem with which great thinkers have struggled for millennia, and it is an existential problem which hits close to home as we find ourselves in a situation of painful separation from God. I will touch on three perspectives that bear on the issue, and aim to show their interconnection: psychological, philosophical, and theological.

First, we can view the problem from a *psychological* perspective. Developmental psychologists study how the identity of an individual is related to the way he or she resolves the tension between “I” and “other.” The way of connecting these two “poles”

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takes various forms as the ego emerges with increasingly complex ways of composing the relation between self and world. As the self matures, it handles the tension between self and other by trying to maintain an equilibrium between “independence” (or apartness) on the one side and “inclusion” (or assimilation) on the other. We long to be intimate with the other, to get back the sense of unity and wholeness that obtained when as infants our sense of identity and belonging was constituted by the face of the loving mother (or primary caregiver).

But as we grow, we are afraid of being absorbed by the other (diffused into otherness), which would

destroy our sense of self-differentiation, and so the two-year-old says “No-No-No” to everything; sharply distinguishing the self from that which is not-I.⁹ At each stage through adolescence and beyond, we try to negotiate relations with others in which we can *protect* the integrity of our identity while simultaneously longing to be *included wholly* in the love of the other. We maintain ego defenses and develop role structures in order to keep the “self” in and the “other” out, but these temporary solutions, aimed at avoiding absorption or abandonment, do not fulfill our deepest needs for love and unity. The failure of self in relation to other has become a central theme in postmodern analysis of the human condition.

We can also see how unity with the divine has been a perennial issue in *philosophy*. In Plato’s *Symposium*, e.g., Aristophanes gives a speech in which he tells a story to explain why humans have a longing to love and be loved. The primeval human was round like a ball, he explains, having one head with two faces, having four hands and four feet, etc. They were becoming so powerful that Zeus wanted to destroy them, but they offered worship to the gods and he would miss that. The ingenious solution was to cut these spherical humans in half, which resulted in less powerful subjects, but twice as many worshippers. Then Apollo healed their wounds and composed their forms, as we now see them. Aristophanes explains, “After the division, the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one.”¹⁰ This story reminds us of the Genesis 2:24 reference to a man and woman becoming “one flesh” (the analogy that Paul uses in 1 Cor. 6:16 for becoming “one spirit” with the Lord).

The larger point I am trying to make is that philosophers have long recognized the problem of spiritual unity and identity; even those in non-Christian religions recognize the importance of the human longing to be one, to be united to an ultimate other. This is easy to illustrate. The ancient Egyptians believed the Pharaoh was the divine representative of Ra; thus the people’s relation to the divine was mediated through his (or her, in the case of Hatshepsut) presence and will. On a cosmic scale, the neo-Platonic philosophers spoke of the longing of the soul to merge with God, or as

Plotinus put it, to ascend to union with the One. Hegel’s system was an attempt to explain how our individual identities could participate in the actualization of the Absolute Geist. The Bhagavad-Gita asserts that salvation or union with ultimate reality (Brahman) is achieved through asceticism and loving action. Because God and humans are on different levels, religious systems have had to try to explain how they can be *united*.

This brings us to the Christian *theological* perspective, which answers the question with the doc-

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trine of the incarnation of the Son, whose work is appropriated by humans through the regenerative activity of the Holy Spirit. How has the Christian tradition struggled with the idea and promise of being “at-one” with God? How can we talk about *divine* being related to *human* being in a single identity? Of course, we think immediately of the council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) and its description of the two natures of Christ in his one person. Much scholarly effort has been put into the christological question of the hypostatic union, and I believe we may learn from these efforts in discussing the doctrine of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Although we must be careful to protect the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the incarnation, we may recognize in this ultimate self-revelation the relational *pattern* of God’s dealings with humans in history.¹¹

The events leading up to and following Chalcedon illustrate the importance of emphasizing what we should *not* say about the union of divine and human; that is, the need to set boundaries for orthodoxy. On the one hand, we should not push the Logos-sarx framework of Alexandria to the extreme as Eutyches did, affirming only one nature. On the other hand,

we should not push the Logos-anthropos framework of Antioch to the extreme as Nestorianism did, affirming a separation of the two natures.¹² That is, we must avoid either a total *confusion* or a mere *conjunction* of the divine and human.

Similar boundaries might be proposed for the doctrine of regeneration: we should not say that “indwelling” means a *fusion* of Holy and human spirit, nor should we say that “paraclete” means that the Holy Spirit is just a really *close* associate. The Eastern Orthodox concept of *theosis* has often been understood as committing the former mistake, while much Protestant piety commits the latter. How can we claim that the creature is “one” with the Creator unless we have some robust sense of their unity? Setting aside some of the infelicitous ways of articulating unity with God, we may still agree with proponents of *theosis* that we are called to be *one* with the Lord. Promising work is being done on the new Finnish interpretation of Martin Luther, which identifies “union with Christ” as the Reformer’s key ontological motif for the doctrine of salvation.¹³

Interestingly, the success of the Chalcedonian council in correlating the two frameworks of Alexandria and Antioch is due, in the view of many scholars, to the intervention of Leo’s *Tome*, in which he introduced the dynamic concept of a *Patre ad Patrem* (from the Father to the Father) into the discussion.¹⁴ This recognizes that we are dealing not just with static entities, but with agents in historical movement. I am suggesting that in understanding the relation of Holy Spirit to human spirit, we need a similar thought-pattern that incorporates the irreducibly kinetic dimension of such a relational unity. The Maranda’s diachronic refiguring of Lévi-Strauss’ model of the structural transformation in myth may help provide such a thought-pattern.

For those of you who may be nervous about my use of the word “myth,” I believe C. S. Lewis’ experience is insightful here. After his conversion, he wrote to a friend that before his conversion he was powerfully affected by pagan myths, that he was moved by the idea of a god who dies and lives again (Balder, Adonis, Bacchus), as long as it was anywhere except in the Gospels. After his salvation, Lewis now sees the story of Christ as the *true myth*, and argues that it works on us in a similar way, but with “the tremendous difference that it

really happened.”¹⁵ This suggests that humans are created, or “high-wired” to use Loder’s term (*Knight’s Move*, p. 285), to experience regeneration in a way that fulfills our sense of longing to be one with God, a longing which is reflected in pagan myths that illustrate the inherent human desire for a special kind of transforming event.

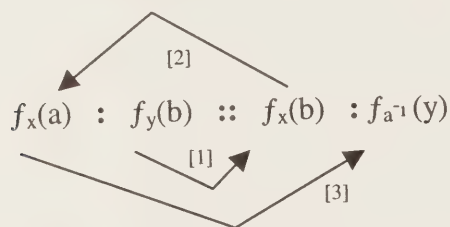
The Transformation of Identity

In his various books (which have subtitles like “the raw and the cooked”) Lévi-Strauss offers dozens of examples of the kind of opposites that are mediated in myths. His early work pointed to parallels between the American Ash-Boy story and the European Cinderella story, which both mediate *low class* and *high class*. He analyzed a myth of the ordering of the world by a duck, who mediated between *solidity* and *non-solidity*. In his most recent book,¹⁶ he applies the formula to several Amerindian myths; e.g., an indiscreet sister mediates *adornments* and *wounds*, the concept of “protuberance” mediates *male* and *female*, and several other examples that tend to shock our contemporary “western” sensibilities. In all cases, the structure of the myth points to an *inherent openness and longing* in human beings for a mediator that can resolve opposites, through a double negation that results in an ongoing dialectical identity.

Now what if the situation that needs a mediator is the ultimate opposition: estrangement of *human* being from *divine* being – the distance between the finite and the Infinite, the temporal and the Eternal? In their various attempts to explain how the *ultimate* opposites of divine and human could be mediated, pagan myths seem to miss the double negation of the human existence-sphere, and the resulting dialectical identity. I suggest that Christian doctrine fulfills these intuitions and explains these conditions in its teaching of the *incarnation* of the Word and of the *ongoing work* of the Spirit. Christianity asserts that humans are sinful and cannot achieve at-oneness with the Eternal through their own efforts; the Eternal must graciously move toward us. I suggest that this “moving toward” should not be simplistically imagined as a spatial coming from afar, but as the incursive presence of God who grants us existence and calls us toward fellowship in the divine trinitarian life. Of course, our *source* of this knowledge is not anthropological formulas, but God’s gracious self-revelation in Jesus Christ by the

power of the Spirit. In light of our experience of this revelation, however, we may be able to see things in the human condition that were there all along.

Turning again to the inherent structural grammar that shapes the human creaturely longing for transformation, let me suggest a way of recognizing the dynamic pattern of the formula in the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit.



I have added enumeration to the arrows, signifying the following labels: [1] represents what I am calling “mediation of opposites,” [2] “double negation,” and [3] “dialectical identity.” The mediator (b) is the Spirit of Christ who takes the initiative in regeneration. First [arrow 1] it is the Spirit of Christ, who as the Incarnate One is the union of God and humanity in one Person; therefore this Spirit is able to mediate the opposites of human and divine. But the transformation also involves a negation [arrow 2] so that the Holy Spirit, whose very being is the divine life [denoted by f_y] really does enter into the existence of the human spirit [f_x] and cancels out the negative action of the defensive ego, whose task is avoiding abandonment or absorption. Arrow [3] points to the final outcome [$f_{a^{-1}}(y)$] of these “positive” and “negative” actions of the Holy Spirit is the re-generation of a new identity for the human spirit. This new “dialectical” identity involves a permutation in which there is something like a figure-ground reversal; the original agent (a) is inverted and now exists as a domain in which the divine life of the Spirit (y) is “hypostatized.” This outcome is an ongoing event-existence that constitutes the *identity* of the Christian, whose life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

One more methodological note, and I will then turn to putting the model to work theologically by offering some more material examples. We remember Karl Marx’s famous claim that he had “turned Hegel on his head,” switching the priority of matter and spirit. Less well-known is Hegel’s claim that his dialectical system was an attempt to “put Spinoza in

motion.” Let me try to put my proposal in a broader context by reaching further back in time than these two philosophers, and then bringing us up to date on the metaphysical dialogue. Plato conceived of the relation between divine and human as one in which love (*eros*) aided the soul in ascending to contemplation of the Good. Plotinus put emanations in Plato. Spinoza collapsed Plotinus by fusing God and nature, *Deus sive Natura*. Hegel put Spinoza in motion. Marx turned Hegel on his head. Durkheim buttressed Marx through social determinism of religious myth. Levi-Strauss structuralized Durkheim. The Marandas put Levi-Strauss in motion. And now I want to turn the Marandas on their head. But I want to turn them on their head in a specifically *christomorphic* way. That is, I want to say that it is *not* the formal grammar of permutation that has conceptual priority for understanding the human longing for transformation, but *rather* that the One through whom all things were made (and by whom all things will be transformed) discloses in his very nature the ultimate relational unity of the divine and human to which our proximate longings only point.

Double Negation and Dialectical Identity

Now let us explore more deeply the structural grammar of transformation and see how it may illuminate the theological concept of spiritual unity. Psalm 63:8 says “my soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.” Phil. 2:12-13 urges us to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling, *for* it is God that is working in us. In Mark 13:11, Jesus tells us “do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is *not you* who speak, but the *Holy Spirit*.”¹⁷ Well... who is holding whom? Who is really “working” and “speaking” – me or the Spirit of God?

Often conceptual models of the relation between Holy Spirit and human spirit focus too much on one or the other of these two “sides” (divine/human) of the dialectical identity. On the one hand, over-emphasizing the “indwelling” imagery of Scripture may lead to the view that the Holy Spirit takes over my mind, and I become *merely* an instrument or vessel. This fails to uphold the integrity of the created human spirit. On the other hand, exclusive stress on the biblical “paraclete” imagery can lead to a view of the Holy Spirit as *merely* a confidant or co-pilot. This fails to account for the radical union through

which the Spirit truly is the primary composer of Christian identity and action. Although they may fail for quite different reasons, these extremes both tend to affirm the *positive* action of the mediator but miss the need for double negation, i.e., the “*negative*” action of the mediator. Yes, the Spirit gives new life – but first the Spirit kills. The Spirit negates the ego-controlled sinful nature of the “flesh” that is bound by sin. Only after dying to sin and to self is the Christian freed to new life. We must be united to Christ in death before we are united to him in resurrection (Romans 6:3-11). To gain our lives, we must first lose our lives (Matthew 16:25). Models that do not account for this negation cannot adequately explain how regeneration resolves the deep human longing to be transformed, to live within the “dialectical identity” which is suggested in Paul’s “I, not I, but Christ.”¹⁸

Let me offer two examples of what becoming “one spirit” with the Lord might look like in the terms of the formula. First, let us look at the Johannine portrait of Peter. After three years of trying to hold

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things together, and help Jesus usher in the kingdom, Peter finds himself undone on the night of his betrayal. When asked whether he was a disciple of this man, we see the profound implications of his response for his sense of identity; he says: “I am not.” Three times he says “I am *not*.” He is in the domain of human not-being: *unable to “be”* who he longs to be. In John’s Gospel, Peter was present when Jesus pronounced his well-known “I AM” statements, linking his presence with the God of Israel (YHWH, I AM who I AM). But Jesus, in becoming flesh and dwelling among us, entered into the domain of existence in which death and non-being reigned, and

conquered them through the victory of the cross and resurrection, mediating the opposites of divine and human being. The new identity of Peter can be seen when he writes in his second epistle (1:4) that we “partake in the divine nature,” the divine BE-ing (*theias koinonoi physeos*). The transformed and inverted life of the regenerated Peter became the domain of the positive action of the I AM.

Let us take the philosophical-anthropological concept of “*exocentricity*” as a second example. “Exocentric” refers to the idea that to be a self involves a being *centered outside oneself* through the mediation of knowing (and being known by) the other, while at the same time being centrally organized by the agency of the ego.¹⁹ Part of the self-identity of the knowing subject is its awareness of what it is not, viz., the other, that which is not-I. The self holds together the meaning of the world, so to speak, through the ego which is both centripetally figured and centrifugally oriented. My identity as a self is conditioned by my relation to others; the “ego” is the agency by which I try to compose a meaningful life, to make sense of my ultimate destiny. But in knowing and being known by Jesus Christ, where the not-I is the presence of the Spirit of God, my very identity as a self is transformed and inverted; my dialectical identity is newly *composed* by the infinite and eternal not-I, who cancels my need to compose my own ultimate identity through the ego.

$[f_x(a)]$ represents the initial sinful condition of the individual, whose exocentric ego tries to posit conditions for its own existence as a defensive mechanism. $[f_y(b)]$ is the positive function of the Holy Spirit who re-centers the self in God, providing the only ultimate way of grounding the self. $[f_x(b)]$ is the “double negation,” whereby the ego is negated as the central organizer of the self; this “negative” function of the Holy Spirit underlines the impossibility of transformation outside the grace of God’s initiative. It is the *hypostatizing* of the mediator (b) into the domain of my ego-controlled existence, negating and inverting it, making me, for the first time, truly free to love.

$[f_a^-(y)]$ is the outcome of a “dialectical identity,” in which the inverted individual becomes a function of the positive action of the mediator. This new identity is radically *trans*-formed. In the normal (i.e., sinful) process of identity formation, the ego

strives to hold its world together around itself. But for the kind of relational unity in which we are “one spirit” with the Lord, the ego (as a functional structure striving to posit the conditions for the existence of the self) must be inverted so that the self as human spirit can rest transparently in the infinite Power that established it (to borrow Kierkegaard’s phrase); it now accepts its identity and destiny as a gift of grace. This was intuited by Martin Luther when he insisted that believers exist *extra se in Christo* (outside themselves in Christ).

I have tried to illustrate the explanatory power of an anthropological formula that points toward a theological fulfillment. But this interdisciplinary effort shares one important limitation with all theological language. It does not exhaust the divine act, nor circumscribe it. It is not intended to explain God’s action comprehensively, or reduce it to anthropological “depth descriptions.” For when the opposites that are mediated are the ultimate opposites of Creator and creature, the model itself is inverted and transformed by Christ who is all in all. The formula simply helps us *formulate* an explanation for our Christian experience of spiritual regeneration; it aids us in our search for ultimate intelligibility – a search that reaches consistently through all of creation from mathematical structures to structures of the mind, to structures of the cosmos. Anthropological explanations cannot exhaust the religious dimension of human existence, but they can point toward the need for fuller *theological* explanations. The apologetic force of this argument is not based on incorrigible foundations that compel universal assent. Rather, it is an appeal to the explanatory power of the Christian claim that the Spirit of Christ fulfills the inherent longing of human beings. It is an attempt to witness to the promise of the Holy Spirit to transform lives – to say: this is what you really want! This is the answer to your deepest need for love and belonging – God makes a way for you to participate in his eternal life of peace and love (2 Peter 1:4).

Conclusion: Fellowship in the Trinitarian Life

Systematic theology has a term for the kind of relational spiritual unity we have been discussing, a term that goes far beyond “permutational” and “dialectical.” This is the Greek term *perichoresis*, which refers to a concept that emerged in the early

church as a way of describing the mutual coinherence of the three persons of the Trinity. The Latin translation was *circumincessio*, implying a movement in, through and with one another. The Greek etymology (*peri*, “around,” and *choreo*, from which we get “choreography”) is meant to suggest a dynamic ontological movement, an intercalation of identities. The point of the doctrine of perichoresis is that in the Trinity, *personhood and relation-to-other are not separated* as they are in us. The divine persons and the divine relations are mutually constitutive. The event-existence associated with the divine life (γ) is one in which there is no tensive anxiety between being a person and being-in-relation.

This is the peaceful life of God, who is love, who is Spirit. We long to know and be known by God, to love and be loved by God. We strive to be united with God, to find peace for our troubled hearts. We were created to throw ourselves on God’s mercy and trust wholly in his gracious love. All of creation is from God, through God, and to God (Romans 11:36). However, this relation can not be upheld from the side of the creature. As long as we attempt to establish our identity by our own efforts, the relation between us and the source of identity (of our very life) is broken. We cannot hold our personhood and our relations to others (or to *the Other*) together. The defenses of our autonomous ego keep our self-identity separate from our self-alterity, our relation to other persons. But there is One whose personhood is constituted by self-relationality and infinite love, in Whom there is no bifurcation between being and relation, One Who holds all things together.

We were created for fellowship with this One, to be spiritually united to God in Christ. We are called to a *koinonia* with God, a union that is so deeply perichoretic that our anxiety about losing our personhood through relation with the other is dissolved as we rest in the One whose personhood is constituted by self-giving love. In the work of the Spirit of God called *regeneration*, our defenses that keep us from real love are negated, and we are freed for a new integration, a new identity received by grace, in which our selfhood is re-centered in the divine life of the Spirit. The event-existence of the perichoretic divine life transforms and upholds us so that we can live in, by, from, through and to the Spirit of Christ, becoming “one spirit” with the Lord.

Notes

1. When asked to contribute to this special issue of the PTR, I felt that perhaps the best way to honor James Loder's work would be to engage it seriously and incorporate it within a constructive proposal. While I rely on and heavily quote from Loder's various writings, he should not be held responsible for the speculative parts of what follows. He is responsible, however, for enabling me to develop the courage to speculate.

2. Other key passages that address the issue of the Christian's relational union with God include: John 17, where Jesus prays that we may become one in God *just as* Jesus and the Father are one, Galatians 4:19, which indicates that not only are we "in Christ" but Christ is being formed "in us," and 1 Corinthians 12, which describes us as being in the one Spirit and the one Spirit as in us.

3. For a fuller analysis of the relation between philosophical and systematic theology, see my *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, chapter 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

4. The use of the terms "proximate" and "ultimate" in the interdisciplinary linking of the human sciences and theology is borrowed from Loder. See, e.g., his *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard 1989), p. 172, and [with W. Jim Neidhardt] his *The Knight's Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), pp. 13, 273.

5. Levi-Strauss proposed the formula first in a 1955 article "The Structural Study of Myth." See *Structural Anthropology*, translated by C. Jacobson and B.G. Schoepf (San Francisco: Basic Books, 1963), p. 228. In his more recent *The Story of Lynx*, translated by C. Tihanyi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), Levi-Strauss reasserts the formula and points to a wide range of scholars who have appropriated its explanatory value (e.g. pp. 104, 133). In a footnote in *The Transforming Moment* (p. 160), Loder suggested that this Lévi-Straussian formula could be applied to the redemptive activity of the incarnate Christ. The current essay is an attempt to follow and expand this line of thought vis-à-vis the regenerate identity of the Christian.

6. Deconstructivist and post-structuralist scholars

would criticize Levi-Strauss along with anyone who claims to find similarities or common structures among human beings. In this paper our concern is not with this debate, but it is important to note that their criticisms at this philosophical level are subject to the problems of self-referential incoherence one finds in all radical relativist and nihilist positions.

7. See, e.g., *Transforming Moment*, p. 105; *Knight's Move*, p. 103. The need to include the role of "negation" in human transformation was already emphasized by Loder in his early work: see, e.g., *Religious Pathology and Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), and "Negation and Transformation: A Study in Theology and Human Development" in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Morristown, NJ: Silver Burdett, 1980).

8. Maranda, Elli and Pierre, *Structural Models in Folklore and Transformational Essays* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), p. 28.

9. Loder has summarized years of reflection on these issues in his recent *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998); see esp. chapter 4.

10. *The Works of Plato*, edited by Irwin Edman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1928), p. 339.

11. This is a common theme in Loder and Neidhardt's christological reflections in *The Knight's Move*.

12. The distinction between the Logos-sarx and Logos-anthropos christologies of the patristic period is developed and described by Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).

13. Braaten, Carl E. and Robert W. Jenson, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). For more resources on similar kinds of dialogue, see Robert Rakestraw, "Becoming Like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40/2 (June 1997): 257-270, and Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theological Anthropology: Toward Integrating theosis and Justification by Faith" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34/1 (Winter 1997): 38-73.

14. This is helpfully outlined by Jaroslav Pelikan in *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 263.

15. Quoted in C. S. Lewis: *A Biography* by R.L. Green and W. Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 118.

16. Lévi-Strauss, *The Story of Lynx* (Chicago, 1995).

17. Other verses that suggest the tension of a dialectical identity include Colossians 1:29 ("I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me") and Hebrews 4:11 ("strive to enter that rest").

18. As Professor Loder points out in his classes, we are all eager to bypass "negation" because it sounds so depressing. However, the NT makes clear that we must die in order to live. It is interesting that most scholarly appropriations of Loder's work have passed by his treatment of negation, focussing instead on his (equally important) description of the five steps of "transformational logic" in human development; see, e.g., Michael Welton, "Seeing the Light: Christian Conversion and Conscientization" in *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations*, ed. P. Jarvis and N. Walters (Krieger, 1993): 105-123. Loder's insightful analysis of the four "dimensions" of human existence (including the "void," or threat of non-being) has unfortunately not been sufficiently explored, perhaps due to our dislike or fear of negation. However, it is precisely through the void that the Holy transforms us and gives us new-being. For a discussion of the illuminative power of Loder's model, see my "Pedagogy of the Repressed: What Keeps Seminarians from Transformational Learning?" *Theological Education* (Spring 2000, in press).

19. For an historical review and assessment of the concept of exocentricity, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), especially chapter 2. Loder treats Pannenberg in several places, including *Knight's Move*, 53f., and *Logic of the Spirit*, pp. 27ff. I discuss the possibility of linking Loder's interdisciplinary model with Pannenberg's approach to systematic theology in *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology* (Eerdmans, 1999), chapter 4.

“It’s a Sin to Bore Kids With the Gospel”

Understanding the Importance of Christian Renewal Movements

by Earl F. Palmer

When I think about Christian Renewal, two things come to mind: first I think of the church as an institution changed for the better, and secondly I think of Christians joining together to make that happen, as they are being renewed themselves. What happens in this incremental reformation is that the Christian fellowship is changed in a healthy way. It may be that old wounds are healed or begin to be healed, or that doctrinal confusion is challenged theologically and biblically, or that omissions in ministries are proactively engaged in a new way, or refreshed after a lapse of discipleship memory.

But renewal of an organization is not possible unless we the people are changed, because renewal is not the same thing as reorganization. Renewal at its most fundamental level has to do with individual followers of Christ being changed. It is first of all a personal experience. Men and women are caught hold of by a spiritual and intellectual discovery so good and so important, that together with others who feel that same life-changing importance, they give themselves to the mandate of sharing in the renewing task of the church.

The dynamic event of renewal might be portrayed in picture form as follows. First, visualize a model of the Christian Church as a bicycle wheel. The hub would be the Lord of the church Jesus Christ, who alone is the center point of the church, and who draws men and women to himself. In this model, the men and women are spokes drawn to and secured to the wheel’s hub. By the good decision of God’s design, these spokes are also attached

to the rim, and through the rim to one another. The inner rim is made of lightweight aluminum alloy and is designed to hold in place the pneumatic tire through which the wheel encounters the road.

The entire rim assembly is made up of two parts. The metal rim, because of its light weight, is highly vulnerable to damage except for two design factors: first, the pneumatic tire cushions the irregular jolts and impact of the roadway; and second, the balanced tension of the spokes evenly distributes the hang-weight along the upper arc of the wheel from the centered hub. The bicycle wheel works because the weight is never pressed downward toward the road-side of the rim, but is always suspended downward from the upside arc of the wheel toward its support attachment—the hub—which has the strength to bear the tension of the spokes.

In this parable of the church, not unlike St. Paul’s “body” parable of 1 Cor. 12, each part of the wheel has its vital task to do, but no one part of the wheel is burdened with more than it is able. No one spoke or group of spokes can bear the weight of bike and rider against the road surface, but taken together with the other companion spokes, the weight can be distributed from the center point toward the upper arc. The weight never presses downward on that part of the wheel which is absorbing the shocks of

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road contact. That would expect too much strength of the rim. The bicycle wheel is designed for shared and shifting responsibility, and so the essentially fragile rim is able to achieve remarkable durability and efficiency.

In this parable of the pneumatic tire, the rubbery outer rim represents the mission and ministry of the church toward the world, and the aluminum inner rim represents the fellowship of the church that distributes the weight and ties together the Christians. Just as Christian believers have by their faith been united in the Holy Spirit to the hub who is Jesus Christ, they are also united to each other by the Holy Spirit into the fellowship and mission of the church—the inner and outer rim. The power train in a bicycle flows through the hub, then through spokes, and finally through the inner rim to the outer rim toward the road.

How does renewal fit into this picture of the Christian Church? The church needs reformation and renewal movements when a weakness appears on the tire surface, or in the inner rim, or if spokes break loose. Christian Renewal, as it takes shape in the New Testament letters, is orchestrated by the Holy Spirit to enable believers to face up to weaknesses in the rim and spokes. This is in order to strengthen the whole wheel, so that the Christian fellowship may be faithful to its mandate and most of all united to the good and faithful purpose of God, its source and meaning.

This adaptation of the St. Paul's "body of Christ" parable of 1 Corinthians 12 raises three primary questions: 1) How have renewal movements affected the church throughout its history, and how do they do so today? 2) How does the church as an institution positively relate to renewal movements, as the movements develop their own special identity alongside of and within the church? 3) Are there possible dangers that renewal movements may pose to themselves and to the church as a whole?

How have renewal movements affected the church throughout its history, and how do they affect it today?

We who form the Christian Church need renewal as a constant ingredient in our common life because our freedom has been preserved, and is not erased by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As Karl Barth said, "the Christian Church moves through history in understanding

and in misunderstanding, in obedience and disobedience, in faithfulness and unfaithfulness toward the lofty good that God has entrusted to it." Because we are always at risk of going astray and because we often do, we need regularly to be called back to our living center, to faithfulness in our own discipleship and toward courage in our mission. This need for renewal is evident throughout the history of the church.

There are no New Testament letters that are written apart from the problems of the early church, and therefore every letter is a call to renewed centeredness. The first Ecumenical Council of the church (Acts 15) was called in order to clear the air on mistakes of theology and behavior in Jewish/Gentile relationships, as these problems were gravely affecting the mission of the outer rim, as well as the primary focus of the inner rim on its center. The church's discovery of the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ for salvation of both Greeks and Jews became at that council meeting of the disciples the clarifying point for the early church in its first renewal challenge. Bishop James' speech at the first council of the church helped to repair what was a hurtful and very dangerous crack in the rim.

In our own century, a gathering of Christians at Barmen, Germany sought to re-establish the wholeness and health of the church in the Germany of the 1930s. The confessing church movement grew out of that historic renewal meeting in Barmen in May 29-13, 1934. Their counsel to the church was contained in the six articles of the Barmen Declaration, which directly affected the practical life decisions and actions of the Christians who signed the document those who wished they had. Later in our century members of the Afrikaans Reformed Church in South Africa wrote a similar renewal document to challenge the wound of apartheid in the South African Church and society. These renewal movements were primarily focused upon the need to affirm centered, Christian faith and life over against errors in theology and practice.

Renewal movements have a vigorous history within Protestant churches. They have emerged within the structures of the church denominations as well as between denominational fellowships, and in some instances these groups have even become the headwaters for new denominations. The Missionary societies of the 19th and 20th centuries offer

some exciting examples of creative renewal movements that permanently changed the face of world Christianity. Missionary societies were formed within denominations and later became structural parts of the denominations. Some fellowships, like the American Bible Society, were formed as inter-church advocacy groups. A large group of mission renewal movements were non-denominational, such as the Student Volunteer Movement, YMCA, Wycliffe Bible Translators, China Inland Missions, (OMF), and Latin American Missions.

These visionary concerns were renewal movements in that they were born when Christians caught a vision and personally addressed weaknesses that they found in the ministries of their own denominational structures and local congregations. Christians joined together to make missions happen, and succeeded in making a decisive impact upon the life and health of church denominations.

Renewal movements create in believers a new awareness of the implications of the Gospel toward our daily behavior and ministry, and they also create a fellowship of like-minded folk, sharing the vision and experiencing together the nourishment of solidarity. In renewal movements the church itself is the primary target of affirmation and the subject of the call to repentance. The fundamental pastoral action is therefore first of all and most of all directed toward the people of faith.

The renewal movements with the greatest impact on the church today, it seems to me, are focused on evangelism and Christian life and discipleship. The youth movement Young Life was started by a Presbyterian layman in Dallas, Texas, who was alarmed by local churches' neglect of evangelistic and caring ministry toward youth. Jim Rayburn started this movement that now numbers a professional staff of over 2000, who carry on this ministry in the United States and in other countries. Young Life is a renewal institution separate from any formal church tie, but a ministry that year-by-year is responsible for welcoming youth to faith in Jesus Christ. I have observed these youth then becoming energizing contributors within established churches as they become members.

InterVarsity Christian Fellowship has a similar story. Its American founder, C. Stacy Woods, together with British student leaders, became concerned that University students in large secular

universities deserved to hear a thoughtful affirmation of evangelical Christian faith. This organization, with its student chapters and triennial Urbana Missionary conference, probably has a greater impact upon American Protestant students than any other University ministry in the United States.

Bible Study Fellowship is a non-denominational Bible study ministry founded by a retired OMF Missionary, Ms. Weatheral Johnson. Bible Study Fellowship began as a result of her discovery of the biblical ignorance of ordinary church folk and her determination to help lay Christians study the Bible for themselves. That organization now conducts Bible study classes in churches throughout the world.

The Stephen Ministry program is another example of a renewal movement that began because of concern about the lack of skillful caring ministries for hurting people within local churches. This movement has now plays a key role in the encouragement, listening, and caring ministries of lay people within congregational settings.

Reformation and renewal starts with a vision. Add to this the optimistic conviction that change for the good will happen as individual Christians work together pro-actively, and the result in most instances is that a movement is created. But one principle is basic: there can be no renewal movements without this optimism at the core. Complainers are pessimistic and they withdraw into de-

In renewal movements the church itself is the primary target of affirmation and the subject of the call to repentance.

The fundamental pastoral action is therefore first of all and most of all directed toward the people of faith.

fensiveness. Renewalists act in confidence that their united efforts will have a positive effect. We Protestants have a natural ability to start up organizations, which we see in our renewal movements as well as our ability to start denominations. The key atmosphere in Renewal groups is the confidence

that change for the good can happen here and now.

This means that every renewal movement gains its inner strength and endurance not so much from the omission or error perceived in the rim, but from the appreciation of the truth that inspires the vision, combined with the fellowship and support of like-minded visionaries. Jim Rayburn and other friends who shared his vision started Young Life because Jim was convinced it was "a sin to bore kids with the Gospel." That churches in his city were in fact boring youth was to him a crisis, but the crisis alone does not energize a mission like Young Life. What motivated Jim Rayburn and his friends was the conviction that the good news of Jesus Christ was true, and not only true, but also quite the opposite of boring! The positive energy came therefore not from a problem perceived, but from a joyous truth believed and the fellowship the truth created. The gospel is the contagious positive energy that first created and now presently sustains the vision of Young Life. Where local congregations are alive and exciting they also have the same mixture of faith, fellowship and shared mission. It is therefore the joyous confidence in the good news that makes renewal happen, whether within the church, or in an organization, or alongside of the church.

How does the church as a formal institution helpfully relate to these renewal movements?

This question is not uncomplicated, because some movements are within the church, some are inter-denominational, some are independent from the church structure and therefore non-denominational.

We who make up a denominational church must learn from every renewal advocate, because even those movements that are finally considered to be unhealthy are nevertheless a witness to possible cracks in the rim or within the spokes, and in the most serious cases they bear witness to confusion regarding what is and should be the very center of Christian faith.

As biblical Christians we are mandated to test the advocacy of renewal movements, just as we must learn to test every part of Christian life and fellowship. Within the reformed family of churches this testing is exercised by means of three questions: 1) What is the witness of Holy Scripture, and does a particular renewal vision encourage our faithfulness to the biblical witness to Jesus Christ as the living center of the

church? 2) What is the witness of the confessions of the church throughout the history of Christian experience? Our confessions help us to test if the teaching of this renewal movement is doctrinally centered and balanced as a source of teaching for the church. 3) The test of the fellowship: does this renewal teaching build up the body of Christ and encourage faith, hope and love? Is there an interpersonal, healthy fellowship in the movement? Often it will be an uneasy feeling concerning the interpersonal atmosphere of a movement that will first alert a pastor or lay-person to dangers in the theology or biblical interpretation advocated by the renewal movement.

The testing is necessary and always has been, but it seems to me that most renewal movements that grow up from the people of faith are more healthy than dangerous. The church does well therefore, in my view, to err on the side of generosity of spirit toward its renewalist brothers and sisters, rather than on the side of defensiveness and suspicion. My advice to myself and other pastors is to welcome renewal and seek to establish positive and encouraging relationships with the people who are involved in these ministries. I as a pastor need friends in ministry, both within and alongside the formal structure of the church, and they need pastors like me to be their friend, because one of the greatest dangers in any Christian ministry is loneliness and isolation. Loneliness is a very common prelude to cultism, because the common-sense checks and balances of friends is lost.

Are there dangers that renewal movements may pose to themselves and to the church as a whole?

This is the hardest question. The truth is that there are dangers in any advocacy group, which arise from the shadowy side of the single most exciting fact about renewal movements: the specific, definite and narrow focus which produces its energy and zealous durability. The danger is that this focus can produce self-righteousness and arrogance. When this happens in a believer or a group of believers it produces two destructive results, one theological and the other interpersonal. The theological threat to any renewal movement happens when the renewal movement establishes a new working center for Christian faith around its own point of advocacy. This means that all other themes of Christian

faith and practice are evaluated in terms of one particular point. In this way, what was once a valid and true insight or concern now becomes a false center point. The advocacy was true as an implication of the gospel, but not when it becomes the gospel itself. When this happens, the renewal movement has vectored away from the living center of Christian faith and life. This is what happened at Corinth, as a faith-healing renewal movement succeeded in making their specialty the new center for the evaluation of spirituality. On the basis of that new criteria they claimed to be able to judge the spirituality of St. Paul. There was a vegetarian group at Rome doing the same thing, and the list is long throughout the history of Christian faith and life. In some extreme instances this vectoring has resulted in cultism, as special renewal concerns take on such importance that they become not only the basis for evaluating other people, but a new, false focus point of Worship itself. The Cause and the leaders who teach it have succeeded in becoming the new center.

The cure for this shadowy side of all renewal movements is first of all the generous light that comes from Holy Scripture, which always points us toward the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and secondly the balancing cure that comes from the good humor and give-and-take of the fellowship of believers who balance the whole.

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

I Thessalonians 5:11

On The Necessity of Calling a Spade a Spade:

Heresy, History and Theological Education¹

by Matthew J. Mardis

There's no such thing as 'Gnostic Christianity'! It's a damnable heresy!" I finally cried out, to the elated "amens" of the Baptists in the room. The setting was a seminary dorm room, the topic of discussion was the day's lecture in History of Christianity, and the mood was frustration. Why should historians be so afraid of the term "heresy", particularly at a Seminary? Why is it that the art of distinguishing between true and heretical beliefs is avoided in contemporary theological education?

The following reflections, inspired by these late-night conversations, argue that without the idea of heresy, it becomes difficult to justify the existence of an institution like a seminary or divinity school in contrast to a University. A proper concept of heresy, and a willingness to deploy that concept when appropriate, gives sense to theological education as a pursuit distinct from religious studies. As I argue for the reinstatement of heresy in theological education, I hope to show that a revival of the notion of heresy is vital to the future of theological education and of the church.

I want to begin with a consideration of what might motivate a historian to refrain from making judgments about what does and does not constitute heresy. I will suggest that such an approach stems from a certain understanding of the purpose of scholarly work, an understanding entirely inappropriate to theological education. Moreover, although this understanding still plagues us, I will argue that its time has already come and gone. The current intellectual climate may well prove hospitable to the notion of

heresy. Accordingly, I will conclude by arguing for the necessity of identifying heresy in preparing future leaders of the church.

The Curse of Weber

One would probably not expect, in a university course on the history of Christianity, to hear an individual labeled as a heretic. We take objectivity for granted as a crucial component of academic discourse. Like most basic assumptions, this one merits some probing from time to time. How did objectivity become the end-all and be-all of the scholarly work, even scholarly work conducted ostensibly by the church? Why do we assume that a good scholar must remain non-partisan?

Actually, for most of history this assumption did not hold sway. History writing has more often than not served an agenda, and told someone's story. The enshrining of objectivity stems from the Enlightenment, when new and self-consciously "scientific" methodology came to dominate all branches of knowledge. One could find many willing ambassadors of this project, but in this essay, I want to focus on Max Weber. His conception of the academic vocation encapsulates many of the Enlightenment assumptions that forbid scholars from identifying good solid heresy.²

In 1918, in a speech at Munich University, Weber made a forceful argument for a particular view of

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scholarly work, a view destined to dominate the century.³ His conception reflected his setting in the German research university, a model that at the time had just begun to gain popularity in the United States. Weber advanced a view of the ideal academic as one who produces knowledge for the sake of knowledge. In his view, knowledge production alone should characterize the scholar. Other tasks such as passing along skills, addressing questions of value, or attempting to inculcate values into students had no place in Weber's conception. To make his point, he drew a contrast between how one ought to behave in a political meeting and how one ought to behave as a professor behind a lectern. In the former setting, to "come out clearly and take a stand is one's duty." In a lecture, however, seeking to persuade students of the correctness of democracy "would be an outrage."⁴ Indeed, "whenever the man of science introduces his personal value judgement, a full understanding of the facts *ceases*."⁵ A good teacher offers expertise, methodology and clarity. Only a very bad teacher addresses questions of value.

Weber insisted that one best understands a tradition by treating it as a lab specimen, an impersonal object to which the scholar feels no personal attachment.⁶ One must not address questions of value, and certainly not encourage students to growth in virtue. Only by cold and clinical analysis may one approach a tradition. It seems that, in Weber's hands, traditions became the scholarly equivalent of a dead frog: cold, lifeless, and entirely too rank with formaldehyde to seem personally endearing.

Richard Rorty's Critique of Weber

Weber's approach to learning, like most children of the Enlightenment, now has its critics. Any number of "postmodern" thinkers could help us move beyond Weber's approach. I will focus on Richard Rorty and Alasdair MacIntyre. In Rorty, we find a critique of modern epistemology and of philosophy itself. He argues forcefully and effectively for the incoherence of Weber's "scientific objectivity." I then want to turn to MacIntyre for an account of how we might carry on in a post-Enlightenment situation. I do not introduce their views in order to argue for the truth of them—that would require another essay entirely—but to indicate how far contemporary thought has moved from Weber. Both Rorty and MacIntyre point the way forward

to a place where it makes sense to use a word like "heresy" in a course like Church History.

Rorty likes to call himself a pragmatist, standing firmly in the tradition of Dewey and James. He is not shy in proclaiming pragmatism the wave of the future. He nearly glows with the assurance that something like American pragmatism must be the end result of the postmodern thought of Derrida and Foucault. Rorty sees the Platonic tradition, and the quest for Truth with a capital "T," as exhausted. This includes the Enlightenment heirs of that quest, and thus the rationality represented by Weber. What Weberian objectivity shares with Platonism is a correspondence theory of truth, the idea that what makes a statement true is its relation to some reality external to human subjectivity. Rorty, like many others, thinks this Western tradition has reached an impasse. Pragmatism considers any correspondence theory of truth an epistemological dead-end. Rorty wants to argue that a sentence is true, not because it describes the way things really are, but because "it just plain enables us to cope."⁷ So, for example, to say that Newton, formulated a "true" physics is *not* to say, "Newton describes the world as it really is" (correspondence theory), but rather, "Newton's physics is useful for predicting the behavior of bodies in motion." It coped with the world better than its predecessors did. Later, Einstein produced a physics that coped with the world even more effectively. And so on.

To bring the discussion a step closer to my argument, and to illustrate some of the implications of Rorty's view, we should note that this is Rorty's view of *all* true statements. He denies that there is any "portion of culture where we find something not ourselves, where we find Truth naked, relative to no description."⁸ Science has no greater claim to objectivity than poetry. Indeed, Rorty admits "no metaphysical difference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science."⁹ Rorty will not permit the Weberian conceit that pays tribute to objective, rational science as "better" than "subjective" disciplines. He would recognize Weber's airtight distinction between fact and value as a modern fantasy.

I, of course, do not wholeheartedly endorse Rorty's position. To do so would be the demise of any real idea of heresy because Rorty denies that there is any Truth. Without any objective truth

about, say, the divinity of Jesus, there could be no real heresy (like Arianism). However, Rorty is helpful in showing that Weber's rational method of attempted objectivity falls short of its goal. Rorty encourages an honest admission of the "contingent character of our starting points" and counsels us to embrace our own community, "the fallible and transitory human projects" that constitute our lives.¹⁰ The role of the social sciences and history ought to lie in "interpreting other people to us, and thus enlarging our sense of community."¹¹ Significantly, Rorty's critique of Enlightenment objectivity ends in the recommendation of community as epistemological starting point.

MacIntyre's Alternative to Weber

Community also figures prominently in Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, a study in moral theory. The upshot of MacIntyre's argument is that the collapse of the Enlightenment project necessitates a new focus on community and tradition as central to morality. In ethical theory, that Enlightenment project constituted a quest for "independent rational justification of morality."¹² Philosophers assumed that a source for morality apart from all particular religious systems, based only in human reason, could fashion the basis for a universal morality. One finds this quest exemplified, for example, in the moral theory of Immanuel Kant, who thought the categorical imperative offered a rational and thus universal guide to conduct.¹³ The attempt to ground morality in universal reason is fiercely challenged by Nietzsche, who perceived with devastating power the way in which "moral utterance is put to the use of arbitrary will."¹⁴ In the final analysis, all moral argument merely masks and advances the will to power – the Nietzschean insight that drives deconstructionist thought. MacIntyre would recognize Foucault and Derrida's "truth as power" as the final refutation of the Enlightenment project.

Central to MacIntyre's argument is his claim that the Enlightenment project (shattered by Nietzsche) began with a rejection of Aristotle's moral theory. Our options, he claims, are either to embrace Nietzsche or to go back and determine if Aristotle might work after all.¹⁵ MacIntyre chooses the latter. What Aristotle had that modern ethical reflection lacks is a sense of *telos*, a final end of life.

A *telos* offers a goal for life, and in light of that goal, one can know who one must become. A *telos*, and thus a moral sense of self, can only derive from the "unity of a narrative" which can structure our life and give it a sense of a whole, with a beginning, middle and end. Narrative history becomes fundamental to describing and understanding human action.

Yet, one's personal narrative never stands alone. It "is always embodied in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity."¹⁶ Moral identity begins in and is fundamentally shaped by community. Communities embody and live out the narratives that offer a *telos* and a sense of self. It is neither possible nor desirable to escape our particularity. We must realize that we live in and take our moral bearings from traditions. MacIntyre's definition of tradition is helpful, and worth quoting in full:

A living tradition is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about what goods constitute that tradition.¹⁷

The most noteworthy aspect of MacIntyre's definition is the dynamism inherent in communities.

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tradition renders one ill-suited
for moral reflection and
action. Conversely, schooling
in one's tradition proves
crucial for developing virtue.***

He does not espouse an antiquarian or reactionary yearning for some imagined golden age, now long past. Conflict and on-going argument characterize healthy traditions. Those communities not engaged in a lively argument about their own identity, which have resolved all the important questions, are probably dead. We also should note that, if a living tradition embodied in a community forms the central basis for moral reflection, an essential virtue is possession of an "adequate sense" of one's own tradition.¹⁸ Lacking a sense of one's tradition

renders one ill-suited for moral reflection and action. Conversely, schooling in one's tradition proves crucial for developing virtue. So, MacIntyre views reflection that is deeply embedded in a tradition as an asset. This view is in direct contradiction to Weber's thesis which places such merit on eschewing all subjective tradition.

MacIntyre and Rorty can help us to clear away much debris on the road to rehabilitating heresy. Before we do, however, I want to offer one more argument for rejecting Weber's conception of the academic vocation, an argument from the peculiar task of the seminary and the divinity school. Quite apart from the critiques of Rorty and MacIntyre, we still need to ask if Weber's conception of education, as outlined above, suits theological education.

Formation in the Christian Tradition

Theology, many claim, has fallen on hard times. It enjoys neither influence in the church nor respect in the academy, the two *spheres* to which it belongs. The possible reasons for this marginalization are as many as its interpreters, but I find the recent diagnosis of Ellen Charry especially helpful. Theology, she tells us, "has ceased to be concerned with the cure of souls."¹⁹ Charry locates the origin of this neglect in the rise of Protestant scholasticism and the shift from theology as knowledge of God to theology as preoccupied with "truth" in an objective and rationalistic sense. Seeking respectability from secular arbiters of rationality, such as Bacon and Locke, theology relinquished the cure of souls but still failed to attain scientific respectability.²⁰ To relate Charry's argument to our concern, we might say that theology sought recognition as a Weberian "science," and in the process marginalized itself from both church and academy. Charry writes:

Biblical studies, theology and church history have become thoroughly academized in the modern sense, further distancing them from the cure of souls. Ironically, despite all the efforts to modernize theology, it is now marginal not only to the church but to the secular academy as well.²¹

I agree, and I would label our unwillingness to use the word "heresy" in teaching the history of the church as both cause and symptom of this pervasive marginalization. The ghost of Weber need haunt us no more. It is time to rethink theological education, to ask in our case what an approach to Church History might look like that seeks, not to

maintain a misguided objectivity, but to serve the church.

I concede that theological education is a strange hybrid, not yielding easy answers concerning its nature and purpose. All the same, I would propose a few points as axiomatic. Whatever else theological education may involve, it certainly includes the training of future leaders of the community we call the church. As MacIntyre would remind us, that community embodies and lives out a tradition. The community, quite naturally, requires its leaders to attain a degree of fluency in its tradition. For example, theological education includes training in the original language of the tradition's foundational documents. One does not pursue fluency in this tradition as an end in itself, but as a means to continue and further the ministry of the church, which I would define as the appropriation of the tradition in the given context. Asking what the Gospel means here and now, and enacting the answer, is the fundamental task of ministry. Only students fluent in the tradition can bring it to bear on the here and now; only students fluent in the tradition can become adequate physicians of the soul. Education for ministry must produce students fluent in the tradition of the church.

Training in the tradition appears all the more vital when we take into account the vast theological illiteracy of entering students today. Whereas past generations could count on the church to train its members in the tradition, this no longer holds true. The church has inadequately catechized the students it sends to its seminaries and divinity schools. Students typically have only a passing familiarity with the Scriptures, and of church history none at all. To someone who knows so little about the tradition, hearing the phrase "Gnostic Christianity" from the mouth of a professor could prove baffling. Many students are hearing about church history for the first time, and they are not hearing what distinguishes the church from the heretics. This should keep thoughtful Christians up at night.

In light of the collapse of the Enlightenment project, and academy's re-discovery of traditions, we should finally have the nerve to ask whether Weber's approach to tradition—detached and impersonal—can well serve the goals of theological education. Mark Schwehn proposes an alternative that I find far more appropriate to the task of form-

ing the future leaders of the church in its tradition. He calls it "conversation."

To think about thinkers and texts and to think with them: this is conversation, the conversation of the present with its own past. To think only about a text, and claim that one cannot, as an academic responsibly, think with it: this is Weberianism.²²

Schwehn's approach engages the tradition as a conversation partner, respecting it enough to sit at its feet, allowing it to shape the life as well as the mind. It addresses not *only* the "what" but the "so what." Schwehn tells us that a "tradition-minded academic" will go beyond questions of what a text merely says. She will also inquire as to "whether what the text says about how we are to live and what we are to do is true or false."²³ To do less than this, to leave the Christian tradition on the dissecting table, produces students grossly unprepared to put feet on that tradition and to promote its mission in the world. To do less than treat the Christian tradition as a viable conversation partner places its future in peril.

What we need is a radically unobjective approach to heresy. Accordingly, I now want to argue for recognizing heresy as a practice vital not only to the preservation of the tradition, but to pastoral work. The spiritual health of both theological students and the communities they will minister to depends heavily on the practice of discerning heresy.

Orthodoxy, Heresy and the Care of Souls

What makes a heresy a heresy? The way in which one answers this question reveals much about that person's orientation to the Christian tradition. History taught according to the canons of Weberian objectivity jettisons the term heresy as an embarrassing value judgment arising from an individual's personal Christian tradition. Although Weberian objectivity still carries much weight in the academy, it has (for the most part) given way to another view that is no more friendly to the notion of heresy. History taught according to the canons of radical postmodernism must identify heresy much as it might identify the Confederacy in an account of the American Civil War. It is the side that lost. Thus, the heretics are those who the orthodox outmaneuvered at the councils, or the insufficiently empowered minority, or some such. History becomes concerned not with ideas but with the use of

power, with winners and losers.

Such an account, whether it admits it or not, is reductionistic and Nietzschean to the core. According to MacIntyre, Nietzsche's whole system rested on the assumption that moral utterance always forms a rationalization, and thus a cloak, for an arbitrary exercise of the will.²⁴ Postmoderns like Foucault and Derrida, who distill all discussion to power games (including their own?), embrace Nietzsche's assumption. Athanasius, we might say,

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By contrast, heresy appeals to
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saw in the Arian controversy a ripe opportunity to advance his ecclesiastical career, and for this reason opposed Arius. Giving our tradition the benefit of the doubt means trusting the church mothers and fathers enough to impute to them other motivations than the will to power. To respect the tradition requires a sympathetic attempt to view heresy through their eyes, to reckon with the question of why heresy appeared so menacing in its own day. We should want to know what the Church mothers and fathers found so alarming in heretical teachings. As we do this, Church history can become tutelage in orthodoxy. This last term requires some clarification.

The thesaurus lists such synonyms for orthodoxy as "compliance," "acquiescence," or "conformity." The word carries two millennia's worth of bad associations. Orthodoxy, many charge, commits the great and unpardonable sin of boring us. By contrast, heresy appeals to the rebellious and individualist streaks that drive our culture. Other critics of orthodoxy often fear something far more sinister than boredom. Those who have accepted Nietzsche's account of morality detect something oppressive in creed and anathema, and reject them as arbitrary exercises in raw power.

I want to argue that only caricatures of orthodoxy could ever invite a yawn, or an accusation of oppression. For purposes of this essay, I am defining orthodoxy in terms of the confessions formulated by the first four ecumenical councils: Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon. These furnish a useful definition for our purposes, accepted by the three great branches of the Christian church (Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic) and having in their own day many heretical rivals. When one examines the stories behind these councils—instead of their popular stereotypes—one notices at once the painstaking balance that orthodoxy so often struck between opposing viewpoints. Orthodoxy is like nothing so much as a remarkably complex balancing act.

Newcomers to church history often complain of vertigo in trying to sort out the councils. Who has not felt slightly dizzy after watching the Christological ping-pong match between Alexandria and Antioch? The victory of one school always seems to produce the error denounced at the next council. The defeat of Arius paves the way for the ascendancy of Nestorius, whose condemnation sparks the imagination of Eutyches, who runs headlong into the arguments of Leo, and so on. Trying to keep these rival viewpoints straight has strained

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found to diminish mystery and
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intellect.***

the imaginations of countless theological students, who at mid-term time can display remarkable creativity in producing multi-colored charts, puppet shows and sundry mnemonic aids.

Why, so many students have asked in frustration, does this have to be so complicated? One answer is that orthodoxy does not really adhere to its popular stereotype. If oppressive and simple-minded conformity

characterized orthodoxy, why did it take so long to get it straight? G.K. Chesterton grasped the secret to the maddening back-and-forth of the councils. Orthodoxy, he wrote, “is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn and subtle about the subtle truth.”²⁵ Indeed, “Every heresy has been an attempt to narrow the church.”²⁶ I would add, not only narrow but simplify. Arianism and Docetism, for example, are both simplifying systems. They take a paradox—the full humanity and divinity of Christ, in this instance—and settle the question on one side or the other. Heresies, far from suiting the broad-minded, are “narrow and limited ways of understanding Christianity.”²⁷

Once we recognize the reductionistic tendencies of heresy, orthodoxy will begin to appear in a very different light. Orthodoxy does not put down final answers. It establishes guidelines for reflecting on mystery. The famous formulation of the Trinity as “three persons in one substance” does not settle the question for all time. Rather, it indicates the limits within which one may safely ponder the nature of God as revealed in the economy of salvation. To repeat an often-used metaphor, the creeds furnish the guardrails on the road of theological reflection. Someone, I would say the Holy Spirit, erected them for a reason.

Returning to theological education, if the purpose of such education is indeed to train students in the tradition of the church, identifying heresy becomes vital. Those who shaped the tradition in its infancy—the fathers of the first four councils—identified certain beliefs as heretical because those beliefs narrowed and simplified the church. To know what constitutes heresy is to know the most common ways that people have found to diminish mystery and force the ocean of revelation into the thimble of human intellect. As Bishop Allison writes, heresies “nurture and reflect the way we would have it rather than the way God has provided.”²⁸ To have it our way is a temptation in every age. Because human nature remains the same, we remain susceptible to the very same heresies condemned so long ago.

To identify heresy thus frees us to avoid the most common and persistent errors in theological reflection. It marks the most ruinous detours with large signs, sparing much time and energy. To refuse to identify heresy scorns the wisdom of our predecessors

in the faith and invites unnecessary errors.

Finally, and most significantly, distinguishing heresy from orthodoxy is vital to pastoral work and the life of the church. We must remember that theological reflection, or at least good theological reflection, never occurs in a vacuum. It informs and the shapes the church that it serves. Bishop Allison reminds us that one of the reasons the councils condemned heresy was because it has such cruel consequences for those who believe it. Distortions of truth inevitably beget distortions in life and practice.²⁹ Pastoral concern motivated the church mothers and fathers to denounce heresy plainly. Because there is nothing new under the sun, "scarcely an ancient heresy can be found that does not have a modern expression; scarcely is there a modern heresy that we have not seen before."³⁰

Take Gnosticism as an example. Gnosticism, and dualistic heresies in general, has plagued the church throughout history. To believe that the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ did not create the universe, to quarrel with the claim of Genesis that God created the material world good, unleashes a host of cruel consequences. In the past, it birthed extreme mortifications of the flesh by those who thought the body insignificant to the life of the spirit. In the present, it finds expression in eating disorders, certain forms of individualism, and the shirking of responsibility for creation so rampant in portions of the church. Gnosticism hurts people. Gnosticism is cruel. Yet Gnosticism sits in our pews and sings in our choirs. It remains alive and well.³¹

If theological education ought to train its students in the tradition, in order to equip them to make that tradition flesh in the world, it must identify heresy. It must train its students in discerning the spirits, in understanding the errors of the past in order to recognize their incarnations in the present. Otherwise, those errors will live on to wreak the very same havoc in the lives of tomorrow's congregations that they did in the past. The recognition of heresy matters greatly for the care of souls. Indeed, if we take seriously the duty of the church to speak worthily of God, the stakes for identifying heresy become infinitely higher.

Conclusion

Those who extol orthodoxy and relish heresy hunting must always remain on guard against the

most subtle and pernicious heresy of all. We who treasure the confessions of the church may be tempted to fashion from them an idol and call it our god. It is therefore for good measure that Bishop Allison reminds us that

Neither creeds nor correct doctrines are the objects of our faith. They did not die for our salvation.... Faithfulness to correct doctrine and loyalty to the creeds is not the same thing as trust in the God whom the creeds describe.³²

Amen and amen. Nevertheless, the recognition that the creeds did not die for our salvation does not free us from the necessity of taking them, and their anathemas, seriously. God's people are still destroyed for lack of knowledge, and theological ignorance may yet poison our souls. Freed from the constraints of a fictitious and futile quest for objectivity, we must renew respect for our tradition. This respect necessitates a corresponding willingness to agree with the tradition that there are pestiferous heresies that lie outside of it. Let us be lovingly fenced in by our predecessors in the faith, alerted to the dangers they saw and resisted. If, however, in our arrogance we chose to reject their wisdom, the only alternative is a befuddled church, groping blindly in a cloud of corporate amnesia.

Notes

1 The thought expressed here first took shape under the able guidance of my undergraduate mentors, Douglas Jacobsen and Todd Ream, to whom I am most grateful. I am also thankful to Soren Johnson and the editors of the PTR for their help in producing the final version of this paper. None of these should of course be held responsible (liable?) for the many flaws of this essay.

2 For insights about Weber, I am deeply indebted to Mark Schwehn. See *Exiles From Eden: Religion and the Academic Vocation in America*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-9, 22. And "The Academic Vocation: 'Specialists without Spirit, Sensualists without Heart?'" *Cross Currents*. Summer, 1992, 185-199.

3 See "Science as a Vocation" in Weber, Max. *Essays in Sociology*. Gerth, H.H. and Mills, C. Wright, Trans and Eds. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129-156.

- 4 Ibid, 145.
- 5 Ibid, 146. As Schwehn points out (in "The Academic Vocation," 198, n.1), the decision to translate *wissenschaft* as "science" can be confusing, because the term has a broader scope than what English speakers think of when they hear the word "science." By *wissenschaft*, Weber meant all academic disciplines, including history and his own field, sociology.
- 6 Schwehn, Mark. "The Academic Vocation,"
- 7 Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xvii. Those who want Rorty's argument in its classic form are directed to his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- 8 Ibid, xlii.
- 9 Ibid, 163.
- 10 Ibid, 166.
- 11 Ibid, 203.
- 12 MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 38.
- 13 See Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. H.J. Parker, Trans. (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1964).
- 14 Ibid, 104.
- 15 Ibid, 104-111.
- 16 Ibid, 205.
- 17 Ibid, 207.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Charry, Ellen T. "To What End Knowledge?" *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Thomas W. Gillespie*. Wallace M. Alston, Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 73-87.
- 20 Ibid, 73-83.
- 21 Ibid, 85.
- 22 Schwehn, "The Academic Vocation," 195.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 MacIntyre, 109-111.
- 25 Chesterton, G. K. *Orthodoxy* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1959), 82.
- 26 Quoted in Allison, C. Fritz Simmons. *The Cruelty of Heresy* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 155.
- 27 Ibid, 25.
- 28 Ibid, 17.
- 29 Ibid, 17, 20.
- 30 Ibid, 17.
- 31 For an example of an author who sees Gnosticism as a modern day threat, see Lee, Philip J. *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 32 Allison, 65.

Toward a Consistent Pro-Life Ethic

by Donald G. Bloesch

One of the perplexing elements in the current culture war is the lack of consistency among both those who stress right to life and those who endorse freedom of choice. The cultural and religious right practically attributes to life an absolute value whereas their counterparts on the left enthrone human autonomy over every other value, including the welfare of society. It is indeed ironic that those who adhere to right to life seem unwilling to extend this principle to other issues that militate against life, such as environmental pollution, random killing in war, and capital punishment. On the other hand, it is truly astounding that those who throw their energy into environmental concerns are silent when it comes to preserving the life of an unborn baby. What is worse is the callous dismissal of the unborn child as a person not deserving of respect by the wider society. Social conservatives may have a point when they compare the Nazi treatment of Jews in Hitler's Europe with the wholesale killing of unborn children in the Western democracies. In both cases the victims are labeled as subhuman and not protected by law.

Both political and cultural liberals have lost the moral high ground in this debate because of their strange reticence to speak out in defense of the unborn. Yet they have a point that the proper care of children after birth is also a pro-life issue. They rightly remind us of the fact that countless children in the inner cities of our nation are exposed to chemicals that can lead to premature death by cancer, asthma, emphysema and other grave maladies.

In a time when national elections are again

commanding our attention we should urge our politicians to be pro-life but to be consistent in this commitment. Why are those on the right so silent on environmental issues and those on the left so heedless of the moral law countermanded by the killing of unborn children and in some cases newborn children, who are not deemed fit for life in a culture where worth is measured in terms of usefulness to the wider social good? The answer may lie in the fact that ideological commitments, which are based on self-interest, cloud the discussion and prevent people from probing into the long term moral implications of their decisions on these matters.

Besides the Judeo-Christian tradition a number of other religious and moral traditions forbid the killing of innocents. It is important to see that these injunctions apply to both the unborn and the newborn, indeed to all who try to live and work in an environment that is increasingly poisoned by pesticides, industrial smog, the wastes engendered by factory farms, etc. It is especially disheartening to observe that many of those who are active in the battle against abortion on demand are nonetheless reluctant to press for curbs on tobacco companies, which sell and promote products that diminish and destroy life.

The time has come for people of good will to unite in affirming the reality of a transcendent

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moral law that protects both the unborn and the rest of humankind, including the aged. It is also imperative that we ask for a government that will take an active role in safeguarding its people from the sinister forces that serve death rather than life. We need to resist what Pope John Paul II has called the culture of death where a utilitarian ethic has supplanted an ethic of the divine commandment. Let us ask our politicians to speak with clarity on these issues and come forward with solutions that have a transcendent ethical basis. We need to affirm the reality of an objective moral order that is partially discernible by all peoples but which is given concrete articulation in the religious traditions that have formed the American ethos.

I regard it as unbiblical and unChristian to hold that life should never be terminated under any circumstances whatever. But it is right to affirm that life should be protected as much as possible in an age when life is increasingly seen as expendable. We must firmly resist the notion that life can be willingly sacrificed if it stands in the way of what is personally convenient or socially desirable. I look forward to a society that is willing to press for gun control as well as for the closing of abortion clinics. We should regard both industrial pollution and the moral pollution associated with unregulated pornography as social evils that need to be countered. We should strive for racial justice and for moral rectitude and integrity on the part of our civic and national leaders. We cannot make people moral by the force of law, but we can protect people from immorality. This should be our goal and concern in the political decisions of our time.

Sermons

A View from the Parapet

by C. Clifton Black

This sermon was delivered on November, 18 1999 during chapel worship service at the seminary. Dr. Black's text is Matthew 18:1-9.

For a Christian trait once characterized by St. Chrysostom as the “mother, nurse, and center of all other virtues,”¹ humility has fallen on tough times. Long ago in the medieval twilight, Christian asceticism took some terribly wrong turns, occasionally mistaking humility with self-degradation and piety with masochism. In our own day I fear that Christian women have been especially prey to such deformed and deforming religiosity. For a fact I can tell you that it warped too many years of my own life. But I can also tell you that in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus never plumps for such sick self-destruction. Lately Christians have been tempted to the opposite extreme of error’s arc, to fling themselves into America’s culture of narcissism. But the healing of the church will never come by our exchanging one pathology for another. Matthew insists that we reexamine our vocation to *ministry*, not *magistry*. “The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the Big Guys throw their weight around. But it’s not that way among you.”²

When you think of “humility,” I invite you to stroll outside and reacquaint yourself with “humus”: that loamy soil produced by the decomposition of leaves and other stuff. We are humus, mortal, weak: “We are dust, and to dust we shall return.” That, I think, is

why Jesus counterculturally insisted on acknowledging children; why he referred to those who believe in him as “little ones” with “little faith;” why he upheld little kids as models for his disciples to emulate as we lurch into the kingdom of heaven. It’s not that children are innocent or simple or sinless. Matthew is no sentimental idiot. The critical thing about little kids is their immaturity: they are so needy, so utterly dependent on a caregiver to survive. That is why, if we don’t turn round and become as small as children, we quite literally shall never *fit* into our Abba’s New Creation. Whenever we turn from our favorite idols—our grades, our status, our yearnings for the tallest steeple or plushest promotion—when ever we let *God* be God of our lives, we can lay down the mask of hypocrisy, quit pretending that we are finally in control—over ourselves, other people, and other things—and can shoulder the gentle yoke of our Lord, whose highest claim for himself was his humbleness of heart.³ The humility of Jesus does not batter our spirits. It releases them and shows us kids the way home.

In a book called *A Touch of God*,⁴ Dame Maria Boulding recalls dreaming that she was on the flat, spacious roof of a tall building with a low parapet around the roof’s edge. She was walking about, to and fro, with some adult friends, discussing some grave matter. Near them was a little boy of about five or six: a strikingly beautiful, exuberant child. He darted ahead and back again, lagged behind and then caught up, trying to attract their attention and calling them to play with him. The adults were too engrossed in their grim Princetonian conversation to pay him any mind whatever. He then ran ahead and jumped up onto the parapet, standing with his back to the terrible abyss, laughing. Most of

the adults gasped with terror and lunged forward to seize him. Dame Maria says that she remained still, by now beginning to understand. Before they could grab him he laughed, waved, and jumped off backwards. The friends were horrified, but somehow she knew—as in dreams we do—that on the face of the building, beyond the adults' line of vision but visible to the boy on the parapet, was some scaffolding on which stood the boy's father. The child was safe, and she knew it. Then, she says, the scene shifted: she was still on the roof, her friends were gone, but the boy was back. The two of them now were alone. The child thought it a marvelous game, this jumping off. Sometimes he jumped forward, sometimes backward; sometimes looking and sometimes not—but always joyfully, brimming over with life and love, wanting Maria to play with him. She never saw the child's father but could guess what he must be like from the boy's utter confidence of being safely caught. Eventually, Maria decided to play too—but it was time to get up.

No one has ever seen God. The one-of-a-kind Son, nestled in his Father's bosom, has made him known.⁵ Christ fell into death; in so doing he committed himself into his Father's hands and lives again. We could never make that leap, we could never commit ourselves into God's hands unless Christ had first done so and invited us to go with him.⁶ And there am I on the rooftop, alone with the boy. I watch him jump, over and again, from the parapet into unseen arms, laughing with delight. Eventually, encouraged by playmates who keep me from stumbling, I too may decide to leap in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

¹ John Chrysostom, *Homilies* 1–55 in Acts 30:3.

² Matthew 20:25–26a, paraphrased.

³ Matthew 11:29–30.

⁴ *A Touch of God: Eight Monastic Journeys*, edited by Maria Boulding (London and Still River, Mass.: SPCK/St. Bede's Publications, 1982) 40–41

⁵ John 1:18.

⁶ Here my wording is indebted to Boulding, *A Touch of God*, 41.

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Consider my Servant Job: Challenges to Natural Theology

by Matthew L. Koenig

Ask the animals and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

Job 12: 7–10

It is a common phenomenon in the Scriptures. A person is gazing at the birds of the air or the stars in the sky, when suddenly, wonder falls upon him and praise erupts from within him, as he senses the presence of God in nature. It seems this sense of wonder is not lost on many scientists today. The astonishing age of the universe lifts our minds to thoughts of eternity, while the tremendous force of a living, burning furnace-sun suggests an even purer power, so that psalmist and physicist alike could cry, "Such knowledge is too high for me, I cannot attain it!" (Ps 139:6).

But this could not be the cry of Job. No, when Job says above, "Let the fish of the sea inform you" (12:8), he is not marveling at the simple sublimity of God's handiwork. He is mocking at an obvious, platitudinous, meaningless cliché. "Who does not know these things?" (12:3), he scoffs.

Job's predicament, we recall, is one of the most terrifying of the Scriptures. His story starts as Satan, the accuser, indicts his faith as a sham. "Does Job fear God for nothing? Stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face" (1:9,11). God, showing astounding confidence in the man he calls "blameless and upright, like no one on earth" (1:8), leaves us blanched when he replies to Satan, "very well, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger" (1:12). Job then loses his sons, daughters, and property to natural calamities, but keeps his integrity, and does not curse God. But the tension escalates when the accuser comes again. "Skin for

skin!" he seethes, "stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face" (2:4). Now the Lord afflicts Job with "painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head," and leaves him sitting among the ashes, scraping himself with a broken piece of pottery (2:8).

Enter the three pious counselors, who come to debate with Job when he protests his innocence and demands a hearing with God. Here the Bible bids us to enter the discussion as well, if we dare. How do our contemporary reflections on God's relationship to the natural world account for Job? After all, Job's agony is located precisely in this intersection between the natural and the divine: the fire which "fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants," is "the fire of God" (1:16).

As we attempt to address this question, let us be keenly aware that Job's predicament long ago in the land of Uz has remarkable currency today. When I hear his story, for instance, I cannot help but think of the woman in my church with the glorious soprano voice, whose life was shattered when a careless driver slammed into her car in an intersection. Her body was only bruised and battered, but her husband and one of her sons were killed, and the other son lives with crushed legs.

Clearly any natural theology worth its salt must take account of these phenomena as well as the behavior of strong and weak nuclear forces.

We know, of course, that taking account of Job's situation will not make his trouble go away. This is something only God can do. However, it does mean finding a place in our theology where we are not embarrassed by Job's situation, and confidently expect God to act within it.

For all the tragedy of his plight, there is something refreshing about "considering God's servant Job" in reference to the science and religion discussion. Perhaps it is the way his story turns the table on the typical conversation. It is not a case of apologists trying to protect the Bible's vulnerability by defending the scientific validity of miracles, rather it is a brazen biblical character demanding that everyone—scientist and theologian—consider him.

First, we must admit that Job closes the door on the apologetic value of any naive sense of wonder. Job seems to know what David Hume argued in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, that if we try

to apprehend God's character solely through our observations of nature, we do not arrive at the benevolent figure we hope for. Nature can indeed treat us lavishly: I think of heading down south tomorrow for some sunbathing. But nature can also treat us cruelly: I did not go during September's hurricane! Is God as capricious as the weather? The thought has crossed Job's mind: "If he holds back the waters, there is drought; if he lets them loose, they devastate the land" (12:15).

However, Job does not close the door on all natural theology. Surprisingly enough, current scientific theories about contingency are quite fruitful for considering the situation of this ancient man. Today science distinguishes between two general types of phenomena: necessary, which can be quantified and predicted by mathematical laws, and contingent, which are variable and unpredictable, but still detectable through empirical examination.

***While the relationship between
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natural theology must
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the two.***

Science has long sought to establish theorems and laws for necessary phenomena, but recently scientists have also recognized the importance of contingency. Consider what John Polkinghorne explains about DNA transmission: "the copying process must be tolerably secure, otherwise the succession of the generations will be deleteriously chaotic... [but] if copying were perfect, then there would be no variation on which selection could be brought to bear."¹ We now know an element of contingency is necessary for the development of life, but this was not always the case. As Thomas Torrance points out, Greek scientific thought considered changeless, rational forms to be the way things "really are," and sensible, physical matter to be only shadows of reality. This had the effect of "reducing contingency

simply to what is deficient in existence and lacking in rationality.”²

While the relationship between contingency in scientific theory and the radically peculiar events of our lives is not direct, natural theology must recognize the affinity between the two. In light of the knowledge of contingency, we can understand that Job’s tragedy need not be a *deficiency*, nor does it lack *rationality*. A natural theology based on classical Newtonian physics could not say this. The laws were too deterministic to make any room for anomalies, and could only call Job’s situation absurd. Natural theology today can suggest that it is precisely in the anomalous, contingent situation like Job’s that we may expect to find God at work. Events like car accidents may not be predictable, but neither are they inconsistent.

Does this lessen the tragic element of Job’s condition? Does this mean we will always enjoy the work of God in contingent situations? Of course not, though we must remember that some contingent phenomena are quite beautiful anomalies—the miracle of Jesus healing a leper, for instance.

But we are considering Job, and this directs us to his second challenge for natural theology: to address the reality of suffering. The anthropic principle—that this world is finely tuned toward the goal of sustaining conscious life—must not flinch when life is sustained in conscious suffering. If science has recognized the importance of contingency, it has shied away from the importance of suffering—perhaps because of its success in alleviating it? But science will never alleviate all suffering, and grasping this may allow us to learn something of God through nature. Diogenes Allen is clearly pointing in the right direction when he writes, “to come to terms with our vulnerability to nature is to come to terms with the truth about ourselves: we are natural beings...mortal and vulnerable to disease, accidents, and natural catastrophes.”³ Allen suggests, with Job in mind, that “in loving nature as a whole, and not just those aspects which are favorable to us personally, we are drawn out of our egocentricity and anthropocentricity.”⁴

But we do not only consider tragic anomaly and suffering when we remember Job. He also shows us a peculiar form of humility. If we are wary of placing too much stock in wonder, we should likewise beware of letting humility palliate the passion of our search for God. Job risks offending God in his search for

truth, even as he believes that God will speak. If we, on the other hand, are so humble that we fail to make any claims about God, we play into the hands of skeptics who would prefer that we have nothing to say about him. And if we remain satiated by the mysteries of the natural world instead of seeking the transcendent God, we make the world an idol.

Job’s humility is one that seeks, scratches, and screams for the truth. Its tenacity is on par with Einstein’s resolution, “I want to know how God made this world.” And in the end, let us recall, God does appear to Job from out of the storm. Our pursuits can ultimately have no goal other than his: to hear God speak.

¹John Polkinghorne, “A Potent Universe,” in *Evidence of Purpose*, John M. Templeton, ed. (Continuum: New York, 1994), p.108.

²Thomas F. Torrance, “God and the Contingent World,” *Zygone* 14 (1979), p. 330.

³Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Westminster/John Knox Press: Louisville) 1989, p. 113.

⁴Allen, 113.

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Books in Review

Jonathan Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion

Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Reviewed by Stephen D. Crocco,
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The essays published here were delivered at a conference in Philadelphia in 1996, addressing whether Edwards' thought is or can be, in the words of the editors, a "compelling resource for today's issues." This was the first national Edwards conference that was not dominated by the interests of professional historians. The normative focus was symbolized in the conference poster, which showed the face of Edwards looming over the modern Philadelphia skyline. Curiously, and unfortunately, the poster was not used for the cover of the book. Instead we find a standard Edwards likeness with a subtitle: "Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion."

The subtitle lends itself to an historical emphasis—how Edwards *has* shaped (rather than a normative emphasis—how Edwards *might* shape) American religion. Even so, the two are related, as several of the essays reveal.

Like most collections of essays first delivered as lectures and later revised for publication, the book does not present a unified approach to the subject. Nor does it discuss whether a unified approach to Edwards' legacy is desirable or possible. The book is not, as one reviewer said, "a field guide to help a new generation appreciate the Edwardsean garden." "Field guide" implies a thoroughness that is impossible in a book of nine brief essays on scattered topics. The chapters are snapshots of the work of a diverse group of philosophers, theologians, and historians, together with an ethicist and a professor of English literature. All find Edwards interesting, important, and useful.

Harry S. Stout provided a convenient summary of each of the papers in his "Introduction," so not all will receive equal attention here. John E. Smith

gives the keynote address, "The Perennial Jonathan Edwards," which is the fruit of nearly half a century of involvement with Edwards. Here Smith sets out three of Edwards's ideas, which he regards "as his most illuminating and most powerful in the way of providing resources for dealing with recurrent problems in the world of religion as that world bears on the fabric of society" (p.2). They are Edwards' ideas on the affections, theological realism and conception of history.

Although these are well-worn themes in the literature of western thought, Smith contends that Edwards' particular expressions are sufficiently original and developed that they demand to be considered in their own terms, rather than simply in terms of general concepts or in terms of rival interpretations. What makes Edwards so interesting, according to Smith, is that he anticipated many of the moves of contemporary theology and philosophy. Contemporary thinkers can profit from subjecting their positions to scrutiny using Edwards' arguments.

In "Edwards on God and Nature: Resources for Contemporary

Theology,” Sang Hyun Lee argues that Edwards provides a robust and theologically sound answer to the old problem of the nature of God’s relation to the world. Put more simply, why did God create the world? Much of orthodox Christianity has insisted that God is perfect and unchanging. If so, can human beings play a significant role in the divine plan? Process theologians say no, insisting that God is not perfect but, but God changes and matures as a result of encountering human beings. Orthodox theologians have countered by asking whether this is much of a God. Edwards’ “dispositional ontology” offers contemporary theology a much needed account of how to “include both being and becoming in the conception of God” without the theological liabilities of process theology. According to Edwards, God’s perfect being is disposed to communicate Himself. So God created the world and human beings as an act of the extension (becoming) of His regard of Himself—a regard in which human beings are invited to participate.

Philosopher Stephen H. Daniel took many readers of Edwards into uncharted territory with his essay, “Postmodern Concepts of God and Edwards’ Trinitarian Ontology.” Early on, Daniels introduces Karl Barth into his argument, noting strong parallels between Edwards and Barth on revelation. Over and against reigning Aristotelian, Cartesian and Lockean notions which have conceived of a God “behind” revelation, Edwards and Barth argued that there is no God other than or behind the God who

reveals Himself. Daniels notes that with these ideas, “Edwards’ treatments of (1) God as the space of intelligibility and (2) the Trinity as a communication hint at ideas that have become focal in postmodern discussions” (p. 46). Postmodern theologians would do well to give Edwards a fresh hearing and bring him into current discussions of the doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine receiving considerable attention today.

Veteran Edwards scholar, Roland A. Delatte considers possible trajectories of Edwards’ ethics in our time. In “Religious Ethics Today: Jonathan Edwards, H. Richard Niebuhr, and Beyond,” Delatte focuses on the themes of the centrality of beauty, the creation as a result of an overflow of divine beauty, and participation in the life of God. To give Edwards a home in our time, Delatte gives these themes a distinctly *religious* turn, but arguably at the expense of the Christological center of these themes in Edwards. Allen C. Guelzo’s essay, “The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will,” illustrates how Edwards has had a significant affect on normative debates in earlier times. Guelzo then asks if Edwards can have an effect again. Edwards had his defenders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but a culture of freedom arose to oppose his and every other form of determinism. Yet determinism did not vanish. In its scientific, psychological and technological forms, determinism threatens to drastically reshape the presumed values and freedoms of our culture. Reading into Guelzo, our culture may be passionate about being free, but it

also struggles with a determinism rooted in genes, personal histories, schedules and technologies. Guelzo argues that these subtler and more menacing forms of determinism make Edwards’ brand look mild. What Edwards brings to our time is a powerful set of questions which can lay bare the real roots and fruits of our current struggles for freedom. Guelzo wonders, though, whether we are still humane enough to believe Edwards’ remedies (p. 110).

In “The Pastor as Revivalist,” Walter V. L. Eversley considered Edwards’ ministry in Northampton a failure because he could not overcome the tension between “two fundamentally different approaches to salvation and ecclesiology,” namely sacramentalism and conversionism (p. 125). Eversley concludes that the tension cannot be overcome today either, because the jobs of pastor and evangelist are just too different to be embodied in one person. This chapter could have been stronger had Eversley taken to heart Smith’s admonition that Edwards is a highly original thinker whose stature defies the sort of modern and general categories Eversley imposes on him. Helen P. Westra tackles some of the same themes in “Divinity’s Design: Edwards and the History of the Work of Revival.” The bottom line: Edwards is an important figure today because he is the prototype for the “spiritual awakenings, revivals and reformations [which] continue to be a vital part of America’s religious landscape” (p. 131).

Robert W. Jenson’s essay, “The End is Music,” takes the conference

agenda seriously by starting with "the present debility of the [contemporary] church's eschatology and ask[s] how Edwards might ameliorate it" (p. 161). Jenson notes that eschatologies which assume a mechanistic universe or limit eschatology to a form of personal "eschatological existence" are not very interesting or very Christian. It turns out that they are not very scientific either. So, according to Jenson, by taking science more seriously than prevailing theologians, "Edwards won the freedom to tell a *story* of the world, and to tell it together with the triune story of God as a single dramatically coherent narrative" (p. 165). In harmonious singing, Edwards saw a likeness of this society of great mutual love between human beings and the Trinity, hence Jenson's title.

Perhaps the most provocative chapter in the book is Gerald R. McDermott's "A Possibility of Reconciliation: Jonathan Edwards and the Salvation of Non-Christians." Edwards' allegiance to the Westminster Confession and his hell-fire preaching seem to exclude the question at the outset. But by mining Edwards' extensive notes on his contemporaries who were considering the question, McDermott reconstructs Edwards' belief that "nearly all humans have received revelation, and therefore all knowledge of true religion among the heathen is from revelation rather than the light of natural reason" (p. 180). This does not mean that Edwards believed that the heathen responded positively to revelation, any more than those

who grew up in Christian settings responded positively. Thus Edwards answered the old question about the fairness of God in dealing with those who had not heard. Most did hear something, Edwards argued, and McDermott shows that, for Edwards, many are to be commended for doing so much with the little they heard, particularly in comparison with those who are saturated with Christian teaching and preaching.

Edwards in Our Time is a welcome addition to the large and growing literature on Jonathan Edwards. A cursory examination of the citations in M. X. Lesser's Edwards bibliographies shows that Edwards has been a subject of discussion in every time. Thanks to the Yale University Press edition of the Works of Jonathan Edwards, our time has access to many previously unpublished texts, and we are freed from the corruptions of most nineteenth century editions of Edwards. The Yale edition is giving Edwards the voice he so richly deserves in our time and in times to come. What we do with that voice is another matter.

Surveying the Religious Landscape: Trends in U.S. Beliefs

By George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay. Morehouse Publishing, 1999

Revised by Lynn Robinson, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, Princeton University

Although polling organizations exist all over the world now, Americans are inundated

with survey data from various sources, both reputable and suspect. Mainly polling organizations and survey research firms are concerned about maximizing profits, thus focusing primarily upon information about political and consumer preferences. Amidst the hurly-burly of this fast-paced industry, George Gallup's continuing attention to matters of religious importance is noteworthy. His latest book, co-authored with D. Michael Lindsay, provides some valuable insights into the religious life of contemporary America, filled with tensions and complexity.

Surveying the Religious Landscape highlights the tension between religious belief from other opinions and attitudes, the de-coupling of particular religious identities and religious beliefs, and the belief and interest in the supernatural by Christians and non-Christians alike.

Social scientists often discuss at least three dimensions of religion with regard to individuals: belief (cognitive forms of religious content), behavior (actions, practices, rituals), and belonging (a claim to a particular religious identity). What must be kept in mind when examining religion is the reality of other organizational affiliations in other institutional fields. For example, John Doe belongs to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the religious field, but John also is an employee of Prudential Securities in the work field. Both of these organizations make claims upon John to believe particular ideas, to act in particular ways, and to identify with the organization in particularly strong ways. How

does John juggle competing claims? On the one hand, these two sets of beliefs, behaviors, and identities can be reconciled with regard to many of the particulars. On the other hand, there is sometimes conflict between beliefs, behaviors, and identity for primacy over the other identities.

Gallup and Lindsay provide evidence that Americans have beliefs that appear to be in conflict with each other. Though many Americans believe in God or some higher power, the constraints that this belief places upon practices appears non-existent. Not surprisingly, many people believe in God but practice no particular religion. As Peter Berger, Robert Wuthnow, and Richard Fenn have demonstrated, practices are vitally important for maintaining a particular view of the world. As Americans spend most of their day at work and the remaining hours with family and friends, the influence of the religious worldviews are facing stiff competition from the way other institutional spheres are constructing reality (priorities, valid rationales for action, etc.).

Despite believing in God, if one is not in the context of some kind of religious community, other beliefs will be largely shaped and formed by other organizational affiliations like work, home, and friendship networks. While the overwhelming majority of Americans claim some kind of religious identity and profess belief in God or some higher power, those who are actually being shaped by embodied faith communities on a weekly basis is only 40 % or less. Recent research

by Robert Woodberry and Mark Chaves, two scholars who have studied religious attendance, indicates that the actual percentage is something less than 30%. Belief in God remains "part of the American way of life," as Will Herberg described it in his classic *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, but other values and attitudes do not necessarily correspond to the values of liberal or conservative Protestants with any consistency. For example, public opinion is rapidly moving toward a majority of Americans accepting the homosexual lifestyle as legitimate (44 % in 1996), but public opinion remains steadfast in its commitment to capital punishment (77 % in 1995).

Even for those attending religious services regularly, the outcomes are not always what one might expect. Gallup and Lindsay present American Catholics as dissenters from the Magisterial teachings of the church, except on the matter of homosexuality. Abortion, the ordination of women, married priests, and contraception remain difficult matters of conscience for a significant majority of American Catholics. There is more to this Catholic story than *Surveying the Religious Landscape* can adequately address, including matters of how the directives from the Second Vatican Council were implemented in seminaries, theological faculties, and particular parishes. Needless to say, the leaders in the Catholic Church need to think about religious education and its connection with the liturgy and Catholic identity.

Finally, Gallup and Lindsay demonstrate the pluralistic, yet

vital, existence of religion in American life. It appears that many Americans are open to the supernatural in all of its forms. Although the public authority of religion may be declining, the potential for new forms of evangelization among the public seems to be evident. So this is not a call for those who are deeply religious to retreat from public debate. Rather it means that we should be cautious in how we yoke the messages of our various religious traditions to positions that we advocate publicly. As Will Herberg noted, God, though not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is a part of the American way of life. We must be careful when we appropriate this symbol of the sacred for political and evangelistic purposes.

While heartily recommending *Surveying the Religious Landscape* as a wonderful presentation of religion in American life, there are a few points that require clarification. Sometimes the writing slips into suggesting effects of aging that cannot be demonstrated with the kind of data used in the book (see pages 72-76 for example). The data would necessarily need to be collected from respondents over time (longitudinal research) in order to make these such hypotheses testable. Additionally, sometimes figures on the same page (on pages 28-30 for example) are not given the same scale, which can be unintentionally misleading. Keeping in mind these few minor gripes from a crotchety social scientist, you can trust the book paints a provocative landscape.

